

## **i really fucked it up this time by hannahsviolets**

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**Summary:** "Steve Harrington, I'm pregnant with your child. Steve, I'm going to have a baby. Guess what? You're going to be a dad. No, no, no. Steve, I'm gonna be a mom. You don't have to be involved. This isn't a fucking fairytale," (Steve and Nancy, obviously)

## 1. september

She fucks him into the mattress that night because it's the only thing that she can do. It's the only thing that she can even think of, because really, doing anything else would force her to face reality. A year ago, when she was fighting monsters, this reality probably would've seemed comforting, but now, it's the farthest thing from.

Afterwards, Steve kisses her shoulders and wraps his arms around her waist and tells her that he loves her. Nancy thinks that he doesn't really understand what those words mean. They've just started their senior year of high school – they're still kids who think that they're grown up enough to have sex and throw around words like "I love you." In seconds, Steve is snoring soundly and the proof is right there that they're not ready for this. All she can think is that if he really knew her, loved her like he claimed, he'd know that something was up.

She really wishes Barb was here. She would know what to do.

The next morning, Nancy sneaks out and walks home. *This is the last time*, she tells herself. *You're not going to go back to him. He doesn't love you.* Those words hurt less than the truth. All she has to do is keep telling herself that Steve Harrington is no good and that everyone was right about him. When he calls her or shows up at her house, she'll tell him that to his face. She'll tell him things are over because she can only depend on herself now. She'll take care of this on her own.

And Nancy really means "on her own." It isn't exactly like she can tell anybody. Her parents would freak out. Jonathan would convince her to give Steve a chance. Her girlfriends would do the same, spinning some bullshit story about how this was their dream – get pregnant and keep their man forever.

Yes. That's the truth. She's pregnant.

After a few days of morning sickness and a week after missing her period, Nancy started worrying that something was up and after three pregnancy tests from three different brands; she'd had to admit

those ugly words to herself. This wasn't supposed to be her future. She wasn't supposed to be some fucking stereotype, she wasn't supposed to be grounded in some boring Suburban life like her mother. The most terrifying thing though, was that she had a living, breathing human inside of her.

Steve does show up at her house that night, just as she'd expected. He climbs in through her window, which she knows he thinks is cute (which it is), and smiles at her like she put the moon in the sky. Nancy takes a deep breath before opening the window and facing him.

He kisses her before she can say anything, climbing in and throwing himself on her bed. "Where'd you go this morning? I missed you,"

*Don't be a stupid girl who expects her boyfriend to stay.* Nancy shrugs, "I um, I had to catch up on some homework,"

"I was going to make you breakfast," a shy smile appears on Steve's face, the one that he saves just for her. It's the one he gets when he's feeling insecure about what he's saying, like he's embarrassed to hear the words coming out of his mouth because of how cheesy they are. It's one of the things Nancy normally loves most about him, but right now, it's the thing she hates most about him.

"I didn't know you could cook,"

He smirks, easily falling back into their usual banter. "Can't. Unless you count eggs and toast,"

Nancy uncrosses her arms and sits down next to his feet on the edge of her bed. "I don't,"

Finally, Steve notices her discomfort and sits up instantly. "Are you alright?"

Nothing.

He looks at her for a few seconds, trying to detect any sign of how she's feeling on her face. When he doesn't get his answer, he slides his windbreaker off and folds his hands on his lap. "Well, I'm just going to stay here with you then,"

She closes her eyes. *He's not good for you.* This is their thing – their stupid little thing that nobody else knows about. In the aftermath of Barb and the demogorgon, anytime Nancy would get that blank look on her face, anytime she was too scared to fall asleep alone, Steve would just stay there with her. He wouldn't say anything or even touch her. He'd just sit in front of the door, guarding it from the "monsters" or sit next to her on a random park bench, acting as the security guard she'd desperately needed at the time.

"Steve . . . I don't want you to. Not right now," she musters out.

Nancy had never before rebuffed this special secret thing and Steve is taken aback by it. ". . . you want me to leave?"

She slowly nods.

Maybe if this was the beginning of their relationship, he would've suspected something was going on. But now, they're supposed to be at that point where they're honest with each other, and usually, they are. So of course, Steve takes her word for it and stands up. "Okay then. So I'll see you on Monday?"

She knows she's supposed to end things now, but she can't bring herself to do it. All she does is nod silently and unconsciously lean in to the peck on the cheek Steve gives her before climbing back out the window.

As soon as he's gone, she falls back on her bed just as he'd done. "I'm pregnant," she whispers to herself. "Steve Harrington, I'm pregnant with your child. Steve, I'm going to have a baby. Guess what? You're going to be a dad. No, no, no. Steve, I'm gonna be a mom. You don't have to be involved. This isn't a fucking fairytale,"

For a brief moment, she can imagine that life. Her and Steve and their baby living in a little house with a white picket fence, laughing and smiling at the dinner table. That's not the life she wants. She's supposed to go to University and become that strong businesswoman she's always wanted to be. Strong businesswomen don't get knocked up at seventeen.

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Steve lasts two days before he confronts Nancy. He gives her a day to herself, because maybe she's just feeling weird and is in a quiet mood, but then when he called her house the next day and she told him she wasn't feeling well again, he knew something was going on. They always talked about things, always. They always told each other what was going on. Secrets weren't their thing.

"What's up, beautiful?" He sneaks up on her at her locker, scaring her. She rolls her eyes at him.

"You scared me," Nancy says, completely monotone. She goes back to switching her books in and out of her locker. Steve gazes at her, in another attempt to try and understand what's going on.

"Are you okay?" he asks, tentatively.

She looks at him for a split second and then back at her things. "Uh, yeah, I'm fine. I'm just . . . I'm in a hurry . . .class,"

Steve puts his hand on her arm, stopping her from shutting her locker. "Nancy. Just – c'mon. I know something's up. We can . . . talk about it,"

"Nothing's wrong. I told you, I just have to get to class,"

They look the other up and down.

He closes her locker for her, defeated. In her eyes, Nancy looks grateful that he's letting her leave. Her mouth says something different – she doesn't even smile. "I'll talk to you later?" he asks.

She shrugs and walks off.

At lunch, Steve sits in the very back of the cafeteria with Jonathan, who's paying more attention to his homework than he is to him. Sometimes he still can't believe that he's friends with Jonathan Byers, let alone best friends. He guesses battling monsters together is something that bonds you forever. That's the only excuse he can think of.

"I'm just asking you to ask her what's wrong," he leans over the table, hoping the other boy will look up at him.

"Why do I have to do it?"

"Because she'll tell you! You're like her little confi-dante,"

Jonathan looks up at him from underneath his air. "It's confidante,"

"Whatever. Just c'mon, man. I'd do it for you!"

Jonathan sighs and puts down his pencil. "Look, if something bad was really going on, Nancy would tell you. After all you've been through, she'd tell you. You're just being paranoid,"

Steve leans back in his chair, knowing Jonathan is right, but not wanting to admit to it. He wants to believe that Jonathan is on his side, but he's pretty positive in the long run, he'll always be most loyal to Nancy. Nancy could've already talked to him, he could be hiding something.

He waits for Nancy again by her car after school. She sees him standing there and closes her eyes, frustrated. After taking a deep breath, she walks forward. "Steve, I can't – I can't do this, okay?"

"You can't do what?"

"Can you just give me some fucking space? I feel like I can't breathe,"

This can't be happening. Is she breaking up with him? She can't be. She can't break up with him, this can't be it. No. There's some sort of confusion, that's all there is. *Stay calm, dumbass.*

"What do you mean?"

She huffs, trying to compose herself. "I mean . . . I mean . . . I just have some things going on right now and I need space, that's what I mean,"

"So . . . you're breaking up with me?"

These words seem to hurt Nancy because the confidence that she had a moment ago disappears. Steve thinks that maybe it's a good sign, that maybe that's not what she means, but he's clearly mistaken because then Nancy takes his hand and says, "Yes. I'm sorry,"

He's too taken aback to pull away at first. *Yes. I'm sorry. Yes. I'm sorry. Yes. I'm sorry. Yes. I'm sorry.* It rings in his head like a god damn bell and it has to be some sort of sick fucking joke that Nancy is looking at him the way she is. "W-why?" is all he can get out.

She squeezes his hand. "I . . . I don't . . . I just . . . future. Senior year. Graduation. All that. Things are changing,"

Steve takes her hand and pulls it to his heart. "Things don't have to change. I – I love you, Nancy,"

"What do those words even mean?" she's hiding her face again.

"They mean that whatever comes our way, we ride it out. We stick together – you and me. That's the way things are meant to be,"

Nancy pulls her hand away. "Steve – I just can't do this, okay? I'm sorry,"

"Nancy, please! I – I . . . if I did something, please just tell me! I can fix it!"

"That's the thing. You can't," she shakes her head and runs a hand through her hair.

He feels like his world is crashing down. He's trying to think of what he could've done to bring this on, but every thought is racing so fast and he can't think straight. It's like all he can see is Nancy, and her image is slowly becoming less clear.

"I'll do anything. Anything. I just . . . please," Steve grabs her hand again and kisses it, trying to prolong the feeling of her. Nancy pulls away again and opens her car door. "I love you,"

She shakes her head, "Don't,"

And then she climbs into her car and in a matter of seconds she's gone and Steve can't breathe. She's always left him breathless but this is so different. It leaves a pain in his chest and a weight on his shoulders and his mind is clogged with thoughts of Nancy Wheeler and how much he loves her. He just fucking loves her so much and it isn't fair.

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Nancy cries for a good week before anyone notices anything and of all people, it's Mike. She'd locked herself in her room when she wasn't in school and just cried into her pillow and hugged her teddy bear to her chest and wished for happier times, for easier times. And then finally, when her dad made the stupid mistake of asking her how Steve was, she left the table and ran upstairs to her room. Stupid pregnancy hormones.

Mike knocks on the door and lets himself in and maybe a year ago she would've told him to go away, but things really are so different now. She almost lost him and she's not going to take advantage of having a little brother anymore. "Nancy?" says his quiet voice and she wipes away her tears, sitting up and trying to look normal. She hates crying in front of people.

"Oh . . . uh . . . yeah? What?"

Mike bites his lip. "Is everything alright?"

No, no it isn't alright. It hasn't been alright since she read those fucking sticks weeks ago and everything just feels so hopeless. She doesn't know what to do and she misses Steve so much and right now she really just needs someone to be there for her.

She snuffles. "No, actually, it's not,"

Mike looks as if he didn't expect her to say this. "Oh,"

There's a silence and she knows he's trying to decide what he should do. "Do you want to talk about it?"

She pats the space next to her on the bed instantly and Mike closes the door and then he sits down. Nancy glances at him and then back down at her hands. She doesn't know what his reaction will be but she doesn't care. She needs to tell somebody and Mike is the least threatening option.

"You have to promise you won't tell anyone. Not Mom and Dad, not your friends. No one,"

Mike nods. "I promise,"



Nancy takes a deep breath and stares straight at the wall. "I messed up really bad. I, uh . . . I . . . whatever. I should just come out with it. I need to tell someone. I'm pregnant,"

Mike doesn't even double take. He knows she's telling the truth because Nancy is Nancy and she'd never joke about something like this. He stares at the same spot on the wall and then clears his throat awkwardly, "Wow,"

"Yeah,"

He turns to her and sees a tear fall down her cheek. "I'm . . . I'm sorry,"

"For what?"

"That you're sad,"

She sniffles loudly. "That's the thing, Mike. I don't know why I'm sad. I mean, I'm scared, but I don't know why I'm sad,"

"Maybe you're crying because you're scared. Sometimes I cry when I'm scared,"

"Maybe, but . . . I don't know. I think maybe it's like, I'm seeing my future and how doomed it is in front of me and that's where the sadness is coming from," Nancy plays with the fabric on her t-shirt.

"It doesn't have to be. I mean, you don't have to keep it,"

"Still, I still have to have it. I still have to deal with being the pregnant girl and I guess maybe I could . . . get an abortion . . . but I'm even more scared to do that and I'm not doing it and God, I don't know. I just want everything to be set in stone,"

She's crying now and Mike awkwardly puts his hand on top of hers. She entwines their fingers and puts her head on his shoulder, needing comfort. They just sit there like that – Nancy crying and Mike letting her and she's thankful that she told him. Of course Mike would understand, of course he'd be there for her when no one else could be.

After a while, he says "Nancy, uh, if you don't mind me asking . . . does Steve know?"

She sighs. She doesn't want to talk about Steve. "I'm sorry," says Mike. "We don't have to-"

"No," she lifts her head. "I didn't . . . I was . . . I can't tell him. It's not his problem,"

"His baby, his problem,"

"You just – you wouldn't understand,"

Mike furrows his brow, confused. "What wouldn't I understand?"

"That the guys don't have to stick around! It's in my body so it's my problem, not his. He has a choice and . . . I don't want him to make the wrong one," It's the first time she's really been honest, that the reason she's scared is because she doesn't want Steve to make that decision to leave her on her own. She wouldn't be able to deal with him dumping her and telling her to take care of this by herself.

Mike seems like he doesn't know what to say, and then after a few seconds, he says, "Maybe you should tell him,"

"Mike-"

"Maybe he'll surprise you. You never know,"

Yeah, maybe. But maybe he wouldn't.

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**Author's Note: This crossover thing is mostly for my lovely Sennen, because I doubt anyone else cares. If you do - read and review!**

## 2. october

Mike's "friend" Eleven shows up again in October. Or at least October is when Nancy finds out about it, because Mike calls her at like ten on a Tuesday and tells her that he needs her to come get them. But her mom went "out" for the night and took the car that Nancy shares with her and there were simply no other options. She was forced to call Steve.

Okay, so maybe she could have called one of her girlfriends, or maybe Jonathan could've borrowed his mom's car but Steve is the only person she wants to call. (That probably says more than she cares to admit).

So it's 10:30 and she's sitting in the passenger seat of Steve's car, staring straight ahead and actually worrying more about her brother and his friends then she is about the awkwardness of the whole thing. They arrive at some random field in the middle of nowhere, and Nancy practically jumps out of the car and runs over to the small group of kids, all huddled around Eleven. She looks sick and her nose is bleeding and she must've passed out because she's lying on the ground, her head in Mike's lap. Dustin, Will and Lucas are all talking at once and all Nancy can make out is that another weird Upside Down situation happened and the small girl had fallen out of some entrance in the forest nearby. After about three minutes of arguing, they finally decide they'll just take her to the Wheelers' basement and see where to go from there.

Steve picks her up and carries her to the car, where he places her in Mike's lap. Nancy can see from the front seat that he's crying and she wants to comfort him but she has to be the adult here and take care of everyone.

They drop off the others at their houses with promises to call them in the morning with updates, and Nancy climbs in the backseat with Mike. She puts her arm around his shoulder and prays to whatever God there is that Eleven is okay. She can't have shown up again just to die. Steve looks at her through the rear-view mirror and gives her a look that she can't quite make out, but she looks back at him and hopes that he can see it's a look of thanks.

They sneak in through the basement door and Steve places Eleven down on the couch. She's starting to wake up now, asking for Mike and looking around in horror at the two teenagers. Mike grabs her hand and asks her time and time again if this is real and Eleven answers that she's scared. Nancy gets the memo.

"Okay, uh, Mike . . . we'll be outside? Come get me, you know, if anything happens," Nancy says, putting her hand on his shoulder.

Mike barely nods, staring at Eleven while she stares back at him, horrified.

She bites her lip and quietly backs out of the room, Steve following her awkwardly. She closes the door behind him, and they lean against the back of the house.

The uncertainty of it all is quite possibly the worst part of all this - not knowing if Eleven will be alright, not knowing why she's back, not knowing if they're gonna have to fight this monster again. They stand there in complete silence for minutes until Nancy is shivering so much, Steve takes off his jacket and places it around her shoulders. She half smiles a thank you, hoping he gets what it means. He doesn't need to.

Mike finally comes outside ten minutes later and tells them that Eleven is fine. She'd just used her powers to get out of the Upside Down and they overpowered her and she'd passed out. She just needs to sleep it off. Nancy tells him to get upstairs to bed and he nods (she knows he's gonna stay with Eleven, regardless).

He goes back inside and Steve clears his throat. "Uh – okay then. I'm just gonna, uh, go home. I'll uh, I'll see you,"

He turns to leave but Nancy grabs him by the arm. "Can I go with you?"

It's a dumb request and she knows she shouldn't have asked because of course he'll say yes, but it's there and she can't take it back because they both know what it means. And of course, Steve will say yes because he loves her, loved her until he was sick with the feeling. He wants to say no. He wants to tell her to go fuck herself for hurting

him the way she did, but he's not going to because if he was, he wouldn't have showed up tonight.

"Yeah," is his response and Mike and Eleven were quickly forgotten for the time being.

The ride to the Harringtons' is silent. As usual, both of Steve's parents are out and Nancy sees a note on the dining room table reading "If Dad comes home, call me: 251-418-5877." Steve walks right past it and up to his room. For a moment, Nancy thinks about the baby inside of her. She thinks about how Steve's dad is never around and when he is, he's yelling and pushing and throwing things. Steve wouldn't be like that as a dad, would he? She wasn't exactly like her mom, so Steve couldn't be exactly like his dad.

*It doesn't matter. You're not telling him and you're not keeping it!*

Nancy quickly followed Steve and within a matter of seconds, the door to his room was shut and she was pushing him down on the bed. *Mindless sex. You can do this.* Except it wasn't mindless because it had never been mindless. She couldn't just pretend that running her hands through Steve's hair didn't feel like home.

He flips her over so that he's on top and kisses at her lips, then her neck. Nancy tries not to roll her eyes because it's just like him to try and make this romantic so that she'll come running back. She rips off her shirt and pulls his over his head (and God fucking dammit, is he fucking hot). Steve gets the message.

Within minutes, he's going down on her and it's rough and passionate and everything Nancy needs for it to be.

She comes loudly, tugging at the sheets with one hand and his hair with the other. He licks his lips and then moves to kiss her, but Nancy stops him, moving to unbuckle his pants.

"No, uh, it's okay," he says.

She raises her eyebrows.

Even in the dim light, she can see a blush on his cheeks. They stare at each other for a moment, and once Nancy figures it out, she starts

laughing. The sight makes Steve smile and he playfully covers her face with a pillow.

"You actually came in your pants? What are you, twelve?!" she manages to get out through her giggles.

"You're mean," he pouts, clearly joking.

"I'm just stating facts, buddy!"

"You're bullying me. I'm reporting you to the school board,"

Nancy stops laughing and sits up. "I'd like to see you try,"

"What? You think you can take me?" Steve scoffs.

"Oh, I know I can,"

The air between them is suddenly thick. Nancy can smell herself on him and it turns her on immensely. And then they're kissing again. And then they're doing it on his dresser. And then later, in his shower. And then even later, on his bed again.

The next morning, Nancy wakes up with a pounding headache, positive that last night had been a dream. But alas, she's in Steve's room, most of her body hidden under a heap of blankets. Steve has wrapped himself around her like a koala, his head resting on her chest. *How much does a human head weight? Could too much weight be bad for the baby? Oh my God, you slut! You fucked him a zillion times with a fucking baby in your stomach! Your kid is gonna grow up a sex crazed maniac because of you!*

Nancy can't come up with a good explanation as to why she'd even asked to come over to begin with. Mike had needed her, Mike's friends had needed her, and a poor, defenseless little girl had needed her. All she'd been able to see was the prospect of getting dick. Was that all she was anymore? Flashbacks of Barb danced around in her head. *I'm sorry*, Nancy told the girl she couldn't see.

Barb had hated Steve from the beginning. She knew that he was no good and Nancy hadn't listened to her. Even still though, Nancy didn't want to believe that Barb was right. Steve wasn't Dad material.

He definitely wasn't going to stick around if she told him. But . . . he'd been there for her in the aftermath of everything. He'd fought for her. He'd fought *with* her. That had to count for something. But why was it that she was focusing on the good and not the bad now? Were orgasms stopping clear thoughts from entering her mind?

No.

Eleven.

It was because of the way he'd carried her to the car. The way he'd put a blanket around her on the couch. How he put his hand on Mike's shoulder when they'd waited for her to say something. It was because of dumb maternal instincts that were slowly starting to kick in (very slowly, considering how fast she'd ditched them last night).

Pregnancy really did complicate things, but not in the ways that they always tell you it does.

Steve sleeps like the dead. Nancy escapes from his grasp and gets dressed, trying to ignore the stomachache that's creeping up on her.

She can't call home and ask for a ride. Jonathan was definitely still sleeping. *Walking, it is.*

But of fucking course, before she can even make it off the porch, Steve is calling after her. Nancy doesn't even need to turn around to see that he's definitely only wearing a bathrobe. "Nancy!" She keeps walking. "Nancy, please! Stop!"

And then he takes her by the shoulder and turns her around. "Yes?" she asks, somewhat sarcastically.

"You're leaving me like this again?"

"Like what? It's your house, not some skeevy motel," Nancy gives him a onceover. He is, of course, wearing a bathrobe and his hair has flattened in his sleep. *Good*, she thinks. She's less likely to cave when it's not all gelled up or whatever it is that he does to it.

"Still! Why . . . are we not – like – back . . .?" He can't even finish the sentence.

"No. I'm sorry," she says, and she means it. "I shouldn't have come back here last night,"

"Then why did you?"

Nancy starts walking again. She doesn't want to look at him. "I don't know,"

"I think you do," Steve follows her. "I think you came back here because you do love me and you were lying when you said you wanted to break up!"

*I don't love you*, is on her tongue. *We're too young to even know what those words mean*. "No, Steve. I just . . . you know, wanted to hook up. It had nothing to do with feelings or regrets,"

"You could've called anyone! Anyone would want to do it with you!"

"Gee, thanks," she says, walking even faster down the block.

"That's not what I meant! What I meant was, you can get any guy and yet you chose me! That has to mean something!"

"It doesn't," she says it more to herself than to him.

"You needed help last night. You could've called Jonathan, he's Will's brother! But you called me instead. That means something, you can't deny that!"

Nancy knows that he's right. She wants to turn around and kiss Steve. Tell him that she loves him so much that it makes her heart ache. She wants to have a big, epically romantic moment with this boy. But she doesn't. "I just . . . I didn't – I didn't . . . it's whatever, okay?"

Steve grabs her again and then jumps in front of her once she stops. He takes a deep breath. "Nancy . . . I love you. There it is, it's on the table,"

"It was always on the table," she mutters.

"I just . . . I just never stopped loving you and I want to work things out. Whatever's changing, whatever's going on, we can handle it,"



Nancy scoffs. "Really?"

"Yeah, really. I fought a fucking monster for you. I don't think there's anything scarier that we could ever face,"

"I'm pregnant,"

The words escape her mouth before she can stop them. The world stops spinning, and everything surrounding them turns black. It's like they're in a video game, where you can pause it and the characters will stay exactly as they are. Nancy wonders for a moment if Steve had heard her, but by the look on his face, he had. That's when it becomes clearer that this isn't like a video game, because things aren't standing still. Things are coming crashing down.

"Steve," another word escapes her. It's hurt and it's miserable and it's lonely, it's everything that she's feeling. Steve isn't even looking at her – he's looking at the ground. His eyebrows are scrunched together and his mouth is quivering. Nancy wonders if maybe he's just scared. She thinks that maybe she should give him a moment to let the news sink in.

But a moment quickly turns into a few moments, and then a few more moments. And then Steve turns in the other direction and walks back to his house.

"Exactly," she says, bitterly. "You say you'd stay for anything and you're running away! Always running away!"

All Nancy wants to do is cry. She wants to scream at him, call him an asshole, and sob pathetically. The truth is, though, that it wouldn't make any sense for her to do that because she'd expected this exact reaction from him all along. It's what any teenage boy would do, after all.

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A few days pass. Eleven is now staying at the Byers' house. Jonathan had called her exactly three times to come over and investigate something he'd found in his drain. Nancy'd gone over each time, and each time she wanted to say that if something supernatural was going on again, she couldn't help. But she didn't, because then she'd have to

tell him about the baby, and then Jonathan would find some annoying way to defend Steve.

Mike barely sleeps anymore. Her parents are fighting less, but the air is more uncomfortable than usual. Holly keeps asking where Steve is.

Will is shutting himself away from the group. Jonathan rants to her at lunch about how something's up with him and not just the usual PTSD stuff. Nancy tells Mike to talk to Will. Mike is pissed at him because of the "psychotic" way he's been treating Eleven

Nancy cries every night.

She dreams about her and her baby, the baby she loves with all her heart, despite the pain it's causing her. Sometimes Steve is there with them, smiling that charming smile of his and they dance around the kitchen together. Other times, he's not there and she and the baby are left to themselves.

And as usual, when she awakens, the only thing she can think of is Barb and wish desperately that she was still here.

It just isn't fucking fair.

Actually, wait, yes, it is.

This is the revenge she gets for leaving Barb that night.

Nancy *hates* thinking that. She loves this baby so much, and she knows that it isn't it's fault, but this wasn't her plan. She's had her whole life planned out for forever and teen pregnancy was never involved.

"I love you," she whispers to her still flat stomach one night. "I love you more than anything in this world,"

It's the only 'I love you' that means anything anymore.

Mikes come into her room and they lie on the floor together, staring up at the ceiling.

"Tell me everything will be okay," he says.

All Nancy wants is to be able to protect her brother. He doesn't deserve to go through anything bad ever again, but he will. They all will. Instead, she takes his hand and squeezes it.

"Lucas is convinced the new girl is an actual demon. He says she's the second coming of the demogorgan, but when he said that, Will freaked out and tried to attack him. I don't want him around Eleven – I know that's dumb because she's like the strongest person ever, but still. It just feels weird, like things'll go bad. I wish she could just stay here with us. She'd be safe. I'd . . . I'd keep her safe,"

Nancy stayed quiet. Mike practically reads her mind. "Steve will come around," he says.

"How do you know?"

"I'll kick his ass if he doesn't,"

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Steve finally gets up the courage to call Nancy on day five of them not talking.

*You're such a fucking coward*, he thinks to himself as he runs his nails up and down his arms. All his life, his biggest fear was everyone thinking he was a pussy, and here he was, being one. Tommy used to always tell him that, day after day.

"Would you man the fuck up? Stop being a pussy," he'd say, and they could both read the subtext behind his words clearly.

It burned deep to even think about Tommy and all the hurt he'd caused him.

Just like the hurt he'd caused Nancy.

Beautiful Nancy. Smart Nancy. Funny Nancy.

Amazing, wonderful Nancy pregnant with his bastard kid. Just . . . what the fuck? How did it even happen? Okay, stupid question. But they'd been so careful. Even if he wasn't, Nancy was. Wasn't she?

Shit..

What were they going to do?

It had never been a question of whether or not he was in or out. Steve knew from the second the words came out of Nancy's mouth that this was just as much his problem as it was hers. She definitely thought that by walking away he was walking away from her and the baby. Shit. That's *exactly* what it had looked like.

He didn't even know why he'd walked away. It was just out of a habit, maybe. Just like Nancy (and Tommy) had said – he was always running away. He didn't know how to be a real man. A real man like Tommy or his dad wouldn't have walked away, they would've said something smart and kissed their girl. Steve didn't know how to say smart things, or the right things. It felt like everything that came out of his mouth was a mistake.

That's why it took him so long to call, so he could figure out what to say.

Mrs. Wheeler picks up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hey, Karen. It's Steve, how are you?" he says, hoping that Nancy hadn't told her anything and he could keep up his charming façade.

"Steve! Hi, sweetheart. I'm good, how are you? It's been a while since you've been over, we all miss you so much,"

He smiled to himself. One of the best things about being in Nancy's life was her family, and how they were a real family. His own parents barely knew he existed, but Nancy's took great interest in him. Her mom fawned all over him and even her dad, who Nancy continuously called an asshole, would watch a game with him every now and then. Mike wasn't really his biggest fan, but they got along well enough, in the way that Steve would ruffle up his hair and then Mike would try to mess up his, and then get frustrated when it looked even better than before. And then there was little Holly, who was practically the president of the Steve Harrington fan club. ("I can't tell if you're her first crush or if she just likes you better than my dad," Nancy had noted one time). It was an odd comparison.

"Yeah, I miss you guys, too. Hey, uh, listen, is Nancy home?"

"She's up in her room, doing homework, as usual. Nancy!" Karen had obviously pulled her mouth away from the receiver. "Nancy, honey! Steve's on the phone!"

There was some ruffling, and Steve could tell that Nancy was trying to find a way out of talking to him. He couldn't blame her. But within moments, Nancy's quiet voice could be heard saying "Okay, Mom, I got it," and then a louder voice saying, "What?"

It was harsh, exactly what he'd expected.

"I'm sorry."

"Steve, you left me in the street after I told you I'm . . . you know. After you made a big thing about us and our future, or whatever,"

He took a deep breath. "Yeah, and we still have that future. I want to still have it. With you and the baby,"

The noise coming from the Wheelers' was so non-existent, that Steve was almost positive she'd hung up on him. "What makes you think that that's what I want?"

"Because you didn't hang up the phone when your mom told you it was me," he says. "You could've, but you didn't. You want me in your life,"

Nancy groaned. "Let's just say I do want you in my life. How do I even know that's what you really want? That you're not gonna just get bored and leave? Run away again?"

"I guess you'll just have to trust me. Trusting me has never let you down before,"

"It's what got me into this mess in the first place," she responds and he can't deny that, even though he still isn't sure how or when this even happened. "And besides, do you really want to be a fa – I can't talk about this on the phone. Someone might hear. Why did you even call? That's another thing! You could've come to me in person but you called me like a fucking pussy,"

"*You're a pussy, Steve. That's all you are.*" Tommy's words ring in his

ears.

He pauses, trying to think of a way not to get worked up and take it out on Nancy. Deep breaths. "I was afraid because I *am* a pussy. It's the same reason why I ran away from you and didn't talk to you these past couple of days. I'm scared,"

"You don't think I'm scared too?"

"Well, yeah. But you had time to process this. You obviously knew before you broke up with me, and that was like a month ago. You've had all that time and I've had . . . not even a week," Steve states and Nancy is silent again. She knows that he's right.

"I *can't* believe what you're saying," her voice is weak and sad. "I won't be abandoned when I'm fucking nine months in and looking like a whale. I'll just be another one of those sad single moms who everyone avoids because of how sad their life is. I have bigger plans than that,"

"I know. Just . . . believe me, Nance. Please."

He can picture the blush on her cheeks. Nothing makes Nancy melt more than when he calls her "Nance." This time, though, her voice is hardened. "Steve . . . your dad . . . how do I know that won't be you?"

And that's when his composure breaks. "I'm not my dad,"

"I know, but, I don't want to take the chance. I have to think of what's best for us . . ." her voice trails off.

"Nancy, I am *not* my dad. I will *never* be my dad and you're not my mom. We're not them. I love you! When people ask me about the future, the only thing I know for sure is that you're in it,"

Nancy must've needed to hear that because suddenly her voice is soft, like it is in their most romantic, intimate moments. "Prove it," is all she says before hanging up.

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Jonathan calls on Sunday morning. "I need your help with something for my mom,"

Nancy finds it odd that he's asking for help with such a simple task, especially with everything that's going on with Will right now. According to gossip she'd overheard from Lucas, he and Eleven had gotten into some weird supernatural fight and Eleven had run away once again. Now Will was confined to his bedroom as punishment. ("How's Will?" she'd asked on the phone. "He keeps sleep walking out into the woods. When I followed him, he tried to choke me," was Jonathan's sad response).

Anyway, once his shitty car pulls up at her house, she stops midway on the sidewalk and grabs her stomach, practically falling. Jonathan hurries over to her and puts his hand on her back. "Are you okay?" he asks, thinking she'd tripped.

"Yeah . . ." she whispers. The pain quickly subsided. Nancy wonders how long she can keep this from Jonathan before she has to tell him. "Let's just, uh, get to your house . . ."

The ride is silent, but that's pretty much exactly what Nancy expects. Jonathan never really has much to say, even when he's comfortable around you. A part of her is thankful for it.

Her friendship with Jonathan isn't complicated and she likes it that way. When they first started hanging out, it had been purely out of convenience – he wanted to save his brother and she wanted to save Barb. And then maybe, for a minute, Nancy had felt something for him. And maybe Jonathan had felt something for her. But whatever "something" was went away once Steve came back into the picture. Almost immediately, Nancy had dropped the romantic lingering between them and slowly began rebuilding her relationship with her then ex. Jonathan didn't seem to mind much. He actually seemed much happier once he and Steve started hanging out then he'd ever been hanging out with Nancy.

Over the past year or so, the three of them had formed a pretty steady bond. When Steve wasn't with Nancy, he was almost always with Jonathan. It was a bit weird – he used to be the most popular kid in school and now here he was, hanging with the town loner. Nancy smiled to herself at the thought. Little things like that were the things that she loved the most about him.

She knocks herself out of her daydreaming to look out at the road in front of her. And it wasn't the path to the Byers'.

"Uh . . . Jonathan, did you miss an exit or something?" she asks, raising an eyebrow.

Jonathan didn't answer her.

"Hello?"

"We're uh . . . we're not going to my house," he mutters.

"Then where are we . . .?" Nancy begins, but the expression on Jonathan's face tells her the answer. "No! No! No! No!"

Jonathan scrunches his nose up.

"No! Damn it! No. He can't even come and pick me up himself? No!"

"Nancy, just – you don't understand . . ."

"Oh, yes, I do! This isn't your business, this isn't your relationship! You don't know anything about anything!" Nancy humphs, crossing her arms over her chest. *Of course*, Steve would find some way to rope Jonathan in to this whole disaster. He never understood the fucking point of anything!

"Just . . . give him a chance," Jonathan says, giving her a serious look.

Nancy groans loudly. "Why do you always take his side? You don't always have to do whatever he says!"

Jonathan turns away from her then and doesn't say anything.

Within minutes (full of passive aggressive sighing on Nancy's part) they're pulled up at the quarry. Steve is nowhere in sight. "What the fuck?"

Jonathan gets out of the car and then opens the door for her. His silence is telling of how he's feeling about all of this – annoyed. Nancy guesses that Steve hadn't told him she was pregnant, otherwise he wouldn't think of all this as childish.



"Why are we here? What, is he gonna come out of nowhere with a bouquet of roses or something even more cliché?"

Jonathan takes her hand and leads her over to the edge of the quarry. He points to the bottom, to the grass next to the lake and it's then that Nancy understands this convoluted plan.

Written using what must've been thousands of rocks was a simple message: "I love you, Nancy." The whole thing must've been at least the length of a football field. And here it was, out in the open for anyone and everyone to see. It must've taken . . . she can't even imagine. She can't even think, really. Her heart is beating out of her chest and tears are starting to stain her cheeks.

For the first time since she'd read that test, she thinks *Steve Harrington loves me. Steve Harrington really loves me.*

Nancy brings her hands to her mouth to stop herself from letting out a cry. Instead, she laughs happily, which makes Jonathan laugh. She turns to him, her smile taking up her entire face.

"Told you," he giggles.

"Where is he?" is all that Nancy can get out.

And then, as if on cue, Steve walks out of the woods (he must've been hidden behind a tree) and approaches. Nancy begins full on crying then, and runs to him, throwing her arms around his neck and pulling his lips to hers. Steve runs his hands up and down her back, before lifting her up by her but. Nancy wraps her legs around his middle and beams against him, pulling at his hair and trying to get as much of him as possible. She'd forgotten that Jonathan was even there. She'd forgotten that the rest of the world was even a thing. The only things that mattered were Steve and this baby.

"I love you," she says, breathless. And then in a choked sob, she expresses "I love you so much,"

"I know," he kisses her on both of her cheeks and then her chin. "I love you more than anything in the world and I love this baby. I will do *anything* for the both of you. I promise,"

Nancy starts crying even harder.

"Can I go now?" Jonathan interrupts. Both Steve and Nancy start laughing and Steve places her back on the ground.

"Yeah, yeah. Uh, thanks, man. Thanks a lot," says Steve. Jonathan thins his lips and nods uncomfortably before getting back in his car.

"Sorry for yelling at you!" Nancy calls out awkwardly. Jonathan gives her a simple wave.

She and Steve are still all over each other. She's leaned against his chest and his lips are in her hair while his hands linger on her hips. They watch Jonathan drive away before turning back to each other.

"You did this for me," she says, pulling at the lapel of his jacket. "How long did it take?"

"You don't need to know,"

"Did Jonathan help you? What happened? What gave you this idea . . .?"

Steve shrugs. "Uh, I don't know. After we got off the phone, I guess, I just kind of . . . I don't know. I just wanted to think of something big that I could do to show you how I really feel,"

Nancy kisses his neck. "All by yourself?"

"Well . . . I did it at like, weird hours. It would've been kind of an asshole move to ask for help. Jonathan just kind of – well . . . picked you up, I guess,"

Nancy kisses him on the lips again. "I love your smile, did you know that? And I love your eyes, and your moles and your hair. God, I love your fucking hair. You've got great hair, anybody ever tell you that?"

He laughs and tightens his grip on her. "Nope, I think maybe just you,"

"And I love the way you love me. I know I said that you don't love me, but . . . I was scared. I was just as scared as you the other day

and that's why I left you. But you love me. I'm more sure of it now than I've ever been,"

"Even more than when I fought that monster thing for you?"

Nancy stands on her tiptoes and whispers in his ear, "I think that just made me more attracted to you,"

"I love you," Steve repeats. "And I'm sorry for all the bullshit – for running away, or whatever. All I have ever wanted, from the moment I met you, was to be with you for the rest of my life. And this baby? That's like a god damn dream come true. Look at me, man! I knocked up Nancy Wheeler,"

Nancy hits him in the chest playfully.

"No, but seriously. I know that I fuck up a lot, but I never want you to doubt how much I love you. I will love and this baby for . . . for forever. I know it's scary and confusing but whatever happens, we'll figure it out together," Steve kisses her gently on the forehead.

For the first time, Nancy can picture a new life. It's not the life that she's always dreamed of and yes, it's more like the life her mother leads, but better because she has a man who loves her. Suddenly she wants to get a house with a white picket fence. She wants to have a million kids and make dinner together and snuggle up in bed at night. Steve Harrington is her future. This baby is her future. And Nancy doesn't have a problem with that.

### 3. november

"I can't believe the only fucking place I can afford is in bumfuck fucking Pawnee," Steve bangs his hand on the edge of the steering wheel, frustrated.

Nancy fakes a groan and then giggles. "Oh, come on. It's not that bad. I saw a movie there once when I was little,"

"Yeah, for just going to the movies it's fine. For pregnancy doctors, it's shit,"

"I'm sure the doctor will be fine. Everything's going to be fine, alright?"

Steve bit his lip, but nods cautiously. The two of them had decided that they weren't ready to tell their parents yet, which didn't leave many opportunities for money. Steve had never had a job because of his parents' affluence, and Nancy had given up babysitting the previous year in exchange for more studying time. All they had was saved up allowances to pay for prenatal appointments and medications – at least for the time being.

And so here they were in Steve's car, driving a half hour to a small clinic in Pawnee. Nancy intertwined their hands together and brought his fingers to her lips. He winked at her and grinned, this time, genuinely.

They're in the waiting room for exactly twenty minutes and Steve is tapping his foot the whole time, annoyed because they're the only people in the whole place. Nancy's nervous, more nervous than she should be with her supportive boyfriend here, but she has every right to be. Is she going to have to get naked for the doctor? She's never had to do that before. Are they going to ask super embarrassing questions that she wouldn't want to answer in front of Steve? *You're having a fucking kid with him, dumbass. There's no hiding anything anymore.* She's so lost in her thoughts that she doesn't even hear the "Nancy, Room A," being called.

Steve lifts her up onto the examination table and kisses the side of

her head. Even though she hasn't said anything or acted differently, he can sense how she's feeling. "I'll be right here, okay?" he asks, eyebrows raised. Nancy smiles, because yes. Steve is here and he loves her and everything is going to be okay because he's here.

A plump, white haired nurse enters the room and pulls out a clipboard. "So, we're here for our first prenatal check-up, huh?"

Nancy timidly nods, afraid of the judgment that she can sense coming. The nurse practically rolls her eyes. "Relax. You're the third teenager I've seen today. And you're the only one with the daddy along with ya, so consider yaself lucky,"

"Right. Yeah, sorry,"

"Now, do you have any history of any medical problems?"

"No?"

"That includes asthma or any allergic reactions,"

"I'm not allergic to anything and I don't have asthma,"

The nurse is writing things down at top speed and Steve takes a step forward, looking over her shoulder. She gives him a look, but doesn't scold him. "Is this your first pregnancy?"

"Yes," says Nancy.

"When was your last menstrual period?"

Nancy blushes, which embarrasses her more than the question itself. Steve doesn't even seem fazed by it. "Mid August, I think? I don't know, I'm sorry, I didn't even realize I was pregnant until September,"

"It's fine. Do you have a family history of cancer and or heart problems?"

Nancy mentally kicks herself for not paying closer attention to her mother's many rants about random aunts from Florida that she's never met. She's racing through nearly every conversation and memory, trying to think of any small piece of information that could

be helpful. "Uh, I mean, my grandmother on my dad's side died of a heart attack. And my grandpa on my mom's side had stomach cancer, but I don't think anyone else . . . I'm sorry. Can I come back with more information during my next appointment?"

The nurse nods again and continues writing.

"Well, what about me?" asks Steve, sticking his hands in the back pockets of his jeans. "Do you need to know my family history?"

"Another time," she brushes him off instantly, which surprises both Steve and Nancy. "What birth control methods did you use?"

"Well, I was on birth control, and we normally use a condom, but I uh, I think we must've forgotten that night," Nancy crosses her arms over her chest.

The nurse writes some more down and then looks back up. "Okay. Dr. Saperstein will be with ya shortly. I just need ya to undress – bra and underwear too – into this gown. Your . . . friend can leave if you'd like. Also, I need a urine sample,"

"Wait, why does she have to get naked?" Steve asks rather bluntly.

"For the breast and cervical exam," The nurse answers, somewhat condescending. Nancy had done some research before the appointment, but not much. Even just going through the books at the library was embarrassing. She'd assumed that Steve had done some research, but then again, Steve was Steve. People didn't change overnight. "The doctor will be right with you," the nurse repeats, closing the door behind her.

There's silence between them for a moment, and it's almost uncomfortable. Steve picks up on it quickly. "Oh, uh. Do you want me to . . .?" he points towards the exit and Nancy shakes her head.

"No, I . . . I – stay. I'm just . . ."

"Nervous?"

Nancy makes a knowing face and Steve approaches her slowly. "It'll be good, babe, okay? Guy's a doctor. He sees like a million vaginas a

day,"

She hits him playfully in the chest for his bluntness, but in truth, it made her feel better. Steve stands by the door to make sure the doctor doesn't come in while she's getting undressed, and Nancy strips into the paper gown. It's less than flattering, and she's beginning to feel the way that pregnant women in TV and movies do about their bodies – ashamed and disgusted. Steve's whistle when she took off her bra made her feel only the tiniest bit better. Afterwards she walks across the hall to the bathroom and manages to uncomfortably pee in the small cup the nurse had given to her.

A man a few inches shorter than Steve with dark black hair comes in a few minutes later. "You must be Nancy," he reaches out to shake her hand. "I'm Dr. Saperstein. Nice to meet you,"

"Nice to meet you, too. This is Steve," she motions in her boyfriend's direction.

The two men shake hands. "You can both relax. I know that Pawnee probably wasn't your first choice, but not everyone can afford Eagleton Medical Center. Regardless, I've been doing this job for ten years now. There's nothing I haven't seen,"

Nancy lets out a breath she didn't know she'd been holding in.

"Do you have any questions before we start the exam?"

Steve looks to Nancy. "If something's wrong with my baby, will you be able to tell now? I'm only four months in, but I don't want to wait until like month eight to find out it's in danger,"

"It depends on the situation," Dr. Saperstein explains. "We're going to take your blood later on and test for a couple of things. If any of those tests come back positive, we'll talk, but if not, I'd say you're fine for the time being,"

"Okay. Uh . . . do you want me to lie down, or . . .?"

"Yes, just place your feet up on these stirrups here," he motions towards the things attached to the table. Nancy scoots down so she can get her feet right on the edges and places her head on the pillow.

"What would you be more comfortable starting with? Breast or cervical?"

"Uh . . . breast, I guess," the word feels weird and almost dirty on her tongue.

Dr. Saperstein is gentler than she would've expected. The breast exam isn't invasive and it's not full on groping – just feeling at certain places. The cervical exam is an entirely different story. She's holding her breath the entire time until his hand enters her, and then she hiccups back a yelp. It gets even worse once the pap smear begins. Steve clicks his teeth together and she looks over at him. He makes some funny faces and then does his imitation of Jake Ryan in *Sixteen Candles* that she likes so much.

"Everything looks good," says the doctor once he throws his gloves in the trash. "You can sit up now,"

Nancy does as told. "You're nice and healthy, Nancy,"

"Shouldn't I have gained more weight though? I read that by the fourth month, the baby's supposed to be six inches long. I don't think my stomach is six inches thick,"

Saperstein nearly laughs at that. "That's untrue . . . but, no, Nancy, I promise, everything's fine. Pregnancy is different for every woman. Usually it's hereditary though. Do you know how the women in your family looked while they were pregnant?"

"Yeah, I have a little brother. My mom didn't really gain that much weight until way later, though," she exclaims.

"Then it'll probably be the same for you. When you come back for your ultrasound appointment, be sure to mention that,"

"And when should she have her first one?" Steve questions. Nancy's lips turned slightly upward.

"We suggest that you get your first one sometime between eight and ten weeks, so . . ."

"I'm nineteen weeks along," Nancy interrupts. "Can I still make an



appointment? Don't you have to make one like months in advance? If they won't give me an appointment by next week, is my baby going to be in trouble?"

Saperstein pats her hand gently. "No, no. It's just suggested, is all. But if you'd like, remind me later and I'll talk to the ladies at the front about fitting you in somewhere,"

Nancy's shoulders relax.

"Now, I have to see another patient down the hall. Nurse Moone is going to come in and take your blood, and I'll come back after to discuss. Okay?"

The nurse from earlier came back and did as Dr. Saperstein had said. Nancy's queasiness when it came to needles died down a bit once she saw just how much worse Steve was. He was still holding her hand, but he was facing away from her, chewing on his fingernails. ("You're such a baby," Nancy giggled).

It took seemingly forever for Saperstein to reappear. So long in fact, that it left enough time for Nancy to change back into her clothes and take a ten minute nap, only to wake up to Steve reading pamphlets aloud to her. "What are you doing?" she yawns.

"I just thought I'd catch up on stuff I should know or whatever. Plus, you know, isn't it a thing that babies like hearing their parents' voices?"

Nancy mutters a "yes."

"Well, you know, we haven't really talked about it, but if we keep it, I kind of want our kid to know my voice,"

Her eyes glitter and her heartbeat quickens. "You know it's crazy how charming you can be without even trying. So much so that you're still making my heart race like you did when we first starting talking,"

"Hmmm. I didn't think you actually liked me back then,"

"I always liked you," Nancy's more dreamy and moon-eyed right now then she'd ever want anyone else to see her being. "Even back when

you didn't know I existed,"

"I thought you said you thought I was a conceited asshole," he fakes a pout.

"I did. I still thought you were cute."

"Thought? Am I not still the cutest guy in school?"

Nancy rolls her eyes. Steve had changed a hell of a lot since they'd first started going out, but he still thought just as highly of his looks as ever. Still, it made her chuckle. "I hope the baby looks like you,"

Steve makes a face, but then he looks serious. It's that look he gets sometimes that drives her crazy, because it means he's thinking about how much he loves her. "No. We're gonna have a beautiful daughter with your nose and your smile,"

"Oh, come on," Nancy says. "You don't want a boy? Funny and just as cute as his daddy?"

"Boys are a nightmare. You'd hate having a son," Their conversation was playful and light, and everything that it probably shouldn't have been, but neither of them really wanted it any other way for the time being.

"That's true, I guess. I can't even handle you half the time," just as Nancy winks at him, Dr. Saperstein reenters the room, clipboard in hand.

"Everything looks good," he says and both Nancy and Steve sigh. "You're healthier than a horse . . . for now. I mean, there's gonna be a bunch of other tests that you'll have to take each time,"

"Like what?" asks Nancy.

"We'll have to screen you for Hemoglobin, Fragile X-Syndrome and – is either one of you of Jewish descent?"

"Me," says Steve. "Mom and Dad,"

"My dad is," says Nancy.

"Yeah, okay, then we'll have to test you for a *lot*. Our people are cursed, I swear to God. Anyway, we've got to get you on a set of prenatal vitamins and you need to talk to the secretaries about setting up the ultrasound and the next visit,"

"I can pay up front too?" asks Steve.

Saperstein nods.

"Alright then, I guess we're all set. I'll just write you a couple of prescriptions and then you're good to go," says Saperstein.

He scribbles on a notepad and hands Steve four slips of paper. "I'll let you get dressed. It was nice meeting the both of you,"

Nancy and Steve each shake his hand and Nancy smiles brightly. "Thank you so much, Doctor. I really do appreciate it,"

Saperstein shrugs. "Just doing my job,"

And then as Nancy changed back into her clothes and they chatted with the secretaries about appointments and medication refills, she felt safe. The baby was going to be the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen, and Steve would be reduced to the second most beautiful thing she'd ever seen. They'd be able to make something work, even if they hadn't talked about it yet. Dr. Saperstein would take good care of her. They were going to be okay. The baby was going to be okay.

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Nancy and Steve arrived back at the Wheelers' home (telling Karen that they'd been at the movies) to find Mike and Lucas sitting in silence on the couch. The air is thick and uncomfortable and Karen tells them what happened before they can even take their coats off: Joyce had admitted Will to a psych ward that morning. Jonathan had found Will holding a butcher knife to his wrists the night before, staring straight ahead and speaking words that didn't make sense. The boys hadn't been allowed to say goodbye because it could've endangered them. Steve went into the kitchen to phone the Byers'. Nancy made her way to the living room. She knelt down in front of Mike and took his hands in hers, rubbing her thumb over his freezing knuckles. With a small hesitation, she reached over and did the same

to Lucas. Neither of them looked up at her, but it was clear they appreciated it in some way.

Steve came back a few moments later, leaning against the wall and watching them silently. He was trying to think of something good to say, something smart. Mike had never particularly liked him much, but he tolerated him. Lucas was the first of the boys other than Will to accept him into his life, but there was still the awkwardness of not knowing if he could act like a friend or a brother. Finally, the words came to him.

"Hey guys, you wanna go out for burgers and sundaes at the Ritz?" he unfolds his arms and shoves his hands in his pockets. "I'll buy,"

Mike and Lucas glance at each other. Nancy stares up at them, trying to convey that she thought getting out would be a good idea. Lucas turns to Steve and nods, "Can we pick up Dustin and Max?"

"Who's Max?" asks Nancy.

"Our new friend,"

"Whatever you want," says Steve.

They told Karen of their plan and she kissed Steve on both of his cheeks, thanking him for "being such a good boy." Mike rolled his eyes silently, but no one except Nancy saw him. She felt oddly nervous for a second, like she thought that Mike might expose her secret, but the fear quickly subsided. They all climbed into Steve's car and made their way around town, picking up Dustin, and then driving around the park looking for this Max person. Dustin explained that Max was very secretive and didn't like being at home, but she could usually be found climbing trees and skipping stones there.

The boys spotted her sitting by herself on a bench, clicking two sticks together. Suddenly, all the sadness disappeared from Lucas and Dustin as they raced out of the car, shoving each other out of the way to see who could get to Max first. The innocence of it made Nancy smile.

"I'm not gonna tell them," says Mike, just slightly above a whisper. He's leaning his head against the window, not even bothering to watch Dustin and Lucas.

Nancy turns around.

"I should, but I won't,"

She's about to ask him what he means by "should" and why it would be any of the boys' business, but Mike read her mind. "Friends don't lie," he explains.

"You're a good man, Wheeler," says Steve. "A far better man than most,"

The expression on Mike's face changed to something sadder. It isn't the look he generally gets when talking to Steve – that one is condescending, this one is softer. Sweet, maybe.

Dustin and Lucas bombard back into the car with the redheaded girl in tow. She's maybe around Will's height and skinny, but she has a hardened look to her that the boys certainly don't. She's smushed right in the center and says nothing to anyone other than a deadpanned "Wheeler." Mike nods in response.

The Ritz was loud, as it usually was on weekends. Teenagers and children ran wild, gossiping and singing along to the blaring music. Nancy thought that this would be the perfect place to be for the kids right now. A complete and total distraction.

They get a booth near the back and Steve jokes about requesting *We're Not Gonna Take It*, which gets Dustin and Lucas started on teasing his terrible taste in music. Mike examines the menu silently. Max doesn't seem to be paying attention. They order burgers and fries all around (Nancy whispered to Steve that she should get a salad, to stay healthy for the baby, but he ignored her) and sodas (with a water for Nancy).

"Wait, Steve, you never showed us those Halloween pictures!" says Lucas.

"Oh, shit, you're right! Sorry, man," Steve pulls out his wallet and

hands him polaroids of Nancy, Jonathan and himself celebrating.

"Nancy, you look just like Princess Leia!" gasps Dustin and Mike makes a face, speaking for the first time.

"Ew, but you always say Leia's hot,"

Dustin blushes. "I didn't mean it like that! I just mean that her Cloud City look is so accurate! You look just like her in the scene where Lando betrays Han!"

"That was the plan," says Steve. "Nancy and Jonathan's favorite is *Empire*, and Jonathan wanted to look like Luke when he gets his hand chopped off. Don't ask me why Nancy couldn't just wear Leia's snow gear,"

"Don't blame me, you said that material was hard to find!" Nancy slaps him in the side.

"You made those costumes?" asks Max. Her tone was judgmental.

They all stare at her with mixed expressions until Steve speaks. "Uh, yeah, I did,"

Max shrugs and sips at her soda.

"So you guys are like the real life Han and Leia then?" asked Lucas, impressed.

"Well, I mean, Han's a badass. He's cool. He's got great hair. Leia's smarter, kinder, bigger badass, all around too good for him. Yeah, I'd say that's us," he wraps his arm around the back of Nancy's chair. Max watches closely.

"So you guys are dating?" she asks.

"Oh my God, Max, you never listen to anything! Yes, this is *Steve*. He's always over at Will's house, don't you pay attention?!" Mike almost yells at her and the mention of Will made Dustin and Lucas visibly uncomfortable.

"Fuck off, Wheeler, you think I actually listen to you?"

"Ooooh, nice one!" Lucas holds up his hand for a high five, which goes ignored.

"Do you think Will was gonna lose his hand last night? Like Luke in Cloud City?" asks Dustin. Nancy wants to vomit at the imagery.

"He didn't. That's all that matters," says Steve.

"But he could've," says Max. "And it would've been bloody and disgusting and if Jonathan hadn't been there, he would've died,"

"Shut up, Max," Mike shakes his head.

"I'm just being honest. It was only a matter of time. You all saw the way he was acting, the way he treated Eleven. You said it yourself, Wheeler. You know you did. You said he was a danger and a threat and a menace and that we should all be careful. You're just feeling guilty because you ended up being right,"

Mike pushes his chair away from the table and scratches at his wrists. He jets across the restaurant, presumably to go outside. Neither Lucas nor Dustin say anything in his defense.

Steve was upset by her words, perhaps almost as much as Mike. Perhaps because they'd hurt Mike. Max saw the look on his face and her own exterior weakened, like she was scared, like she thought that he would hurt her. Steve didn't even yell at her (he left that to Nancy). He just followed Mike out to the parking lot, where he sat on the curb, his head in his hands.

He sits down next to him in silence.

Mike lifts his head and sighs. It was clear that he'd been crying. "You know, you don't have to be nice to me just because you're dating my sister. I don't want your fake pity,"

"I'm not pitying you," Steve comments, rubbing his shoes against the pavement. "I just wanted to make sure that you knew none of this is your fault,"

"Yeah, right,"

"It isn't. That girl in there? She's just upset too and she's taking it out on you,"

Mike falls silent.

"Can I tell you something?" asks Steve. Mike shrugs. "For a long time, I, uh, blamed myself for what happened to Barb. It was at my house, it was my party. And I think that if I'd . . . not . . . gone inside and I'd stayed out there with her, that she'd still be here. I know Nancy blames herself, too. Now, that, that pissed me off. Why would it be Nancy's fault that a monster appeared out of nowhere and just took her friend? Even if she was there, she wouldn't have been able to stop it. And then Nancy pointed something out to me – if I said all that about her, why was it any different for me?"

Mike picks up a pebble from the ground and throws it across the street.

"Jonathan is my best friend. I would do anything for him and I would do anything for his family, and I know you feel the same way about Will,"

"I did say all those things that Max said," says Mike. "I was really, really horrible to him,"

Steve pauses. He thinks about Jonathan again, and all the things that he'd said to him that day behind the movie theater. He thinks about Nancy that same day, and those things that he let Tommy write. "You can make it up to him. Maybe in a few days, maybe when he gets out, maybe months from now. He's still here, Mike. He's not gone,"

"Yeah, but Eleven is gone. She's gone because of him and I can't get her back. I don't know how I can look at him knowing that I might never see her again because of him,"

Again, Steve tries to put himself in the younger boy's shoes. What would he do if Jonathan was Will and Eleven was Nancy? Probably something stupid. Definitely something stupid. He thinks on it some more, thinks of Nancy and the baby, and Jonathan and Nancy forgiving him. The answer became very simple.



"This is going to sound really lame and I'm giving you permission to make fun of me about it later, but . . . you know, Eleven might be gone, for right now, but you know what isn't? Hope. Hope is always going to be there. Eleven came back once, maybe she'll come back again. And – and Will? He's . . . hurt. And he's scared and he's different. But he's still your friend. Your friend is still in there somewhere, Mike. You just have to wait it out and hope that you get to see him again someday,"

Mike bites the inside of his mouth. He wishes for the taste of blood. The metallic taste could perhaps wake him out of this weird dream where he's having an actual conversation with his sister's boyfriend. The guy was barely a real person, let alone someone he could sit on a curb pouring his heart out to. And yet here they were. And Mike was actually finding his presence to be calming. His words had been kind, they'd lifted a weight off his back.

"You wanna go back inside?" says Steve.

Mike nods. Normally, when they walked side by side, Steve always tried to mess up his hair. It was annoying, and Mike certainly didn't want Nancy's stupid boyfriend touching his hair. This time, he reaches far up and messes up Steve's hair, who does the same to him. Because *Steve* touching his hair is nice.

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Jonathan finally picked up the phone on the fourth day of Steve (and Nancy) calling him. He gave vague, one word answers and wouldn't say anything about how Will was other than "different." Steve insisted on coming over and helping out around the house, which made Nancy coo and Jonathan roll his eyes.

Joyce wasn't home. Hopper had thought that it would be good for her to get out of the house and had taken her to stay with him for a few days. Jonathan had opted to stay at the house and look after Chester. Steve came over, smiling and cracking his typical jokes that no one found funny other than himself. They argued over whether or not they should watch *Family Ties* or *Magnum, P.I.* while they ate pizza (that Steve had offered to buy, and had even agreed to get the gross kind with peppers that Jonathan liked). The evening was spent in peaceful solitude, and for the first time in a while, Jonathan felt his

heart race in a way that didn't have anything to do with being afraid.

After walking Chester, watching Steve chain-smoke cigarettes, and tossing a football back and forth, they decided to call it a night. Or, well, Jonathan decided to call it a night. It'd been a long time since he'd had a good night's sleep. Steve was just willing to do anything to put his friend in a better mood at this point. The two curled up in Jonathan's bed; Jonathan with his hands folded on his stomach, lying perfectly straight, Steve sprawled out, with his arms behind his head.

" . . . I just, I don't know what it is! I liked *Joannie Loves Chachi*, maybe I'm the only one, but I thought it was quality television! Not as quality as *Happy Days*, obviously, but still, good. And now, what the fuck is this fucking *Charles in Charge* bullshit? I love my Scott Baio, but I do not love this fucking bullshit ass low rent comedy!"

"I think it's okay," says Jonathan.

Steve scoffs. "Ugh, of course you do. Nancy says the same thing! I swear, sometimes I think you guys gang up on me on purpose,"

Jonathan chuckles. He steals a glance over at his friend and a thin smile appears on his lips. For a moment, he considers letting Steve go on with his ramblings. They made everything seem normal and ordinary – but everything wasn't normal and ordinary and there was a giant elephant in the room. Both were waiting for the other to mention it first.

"I don't know what to do, Steve," says Jonathan. "I feel like it's back when Will disappeared, that's how hopeless everything is. I'm supposed to protect my family and I can't do it,"

Steve doesn't miss a beat. "Yes, you can. You already have,"

"What do you mean?"

"You got Will help. He's getting help now,"

"Yeah, but – that's not – why didn't I realize he wasn't okay when he first came back? He spent a week all alone being tortured and we all just thought he'd be okay! I just . . ." Jonathan shakes his head, frustrated.

"You *wanted* him to be okay," Steve finishes. "We all did."

Jonathan says nothing, just looks up at the ceiling. It reminds him eerily of that night the police had found Will's 'body.' He hadn't slept then either. Steve senses his uneasiness and places his hand on top of Jonathan's bicep. "Listen, you know . . . Will is so strong. Kid's like my hero, man. Things suck right now, but they won't always. It's like you said – he was tortured and abused. He's not supposed to be okay. But he will be. And it'll be because of you and your mom,"

Words that he was too afraid to say sat idly on Jonathan's tongue, and although he couldn't speak them, he'd never meant them more than he did in this moment. And he thought that right now, under the light of the moon, Steve had never looked more beautiful or more real.

"Will used to tell me this thing," he whispers. "'Friends don't lie.' Maybe it's . . . I don't know, childish or whatever, but it makes me think a lot. You're not lying to me, right? Promise me, Steve. Promise me you're telling me the truth."

Steve's heart burns because he was and he wasn't. He thinks of little Mike Wheeler in the back of his car. And obviously, it wasn't what Jonathan was talking about but it was all Steve was thinking about. "No, man, of course. Your family is so fucking . . . hope, or whatever. That sounded lame, I'm sorry. I just meant – you know, yeah. Everything I said stands."

Jonathan nods and turns away again.

Friends don't lie.

He and Nancy hadn't exactly spoken about telling people. It had kind of just been a silent agreement thus far. She was definitely going to be pissed when she found out that he'd told Jonathan, but his impulsive nature and his heart told him that this was the right thing to do. Yes, here he was, taking the words of thirteen year olds literally.

"Jonathan," he looks over at the blonde haired boy.

"Yeah?"

"I am lying about something. Or – I don't know, maybe it's not lying, maybe it's just not telling you something."

Jonathan pauses. "Uh . . ."

"Nancy's pregnant, man," he lets out a long sigh of relief. It felt strange to say out loud, like it made it more real.

Jonathan doesn't look over at him. His gaze doesn't leave the ceiling, and his face is expressionless. It's expected, because it's Jonathan, and it's hard to get him to show emotion when he's not around his family. He's deep in thought about it though, because there's about a thirty second pause before he says anything. "How far along is she?"

"Like three months,"

"That's why you guys had that big fight last month," The realization in his voice is evident.

"Yeah," says Steve. He rolls over onto his side. "I was an ass first but I'm gonna be there. I'm gonna try,"

"Are you guys keeping it?"

"We haven't really talked about it,"

Jonathan finally looks at him. "Steve, a baby is a baby. It's another person. You have to talk about it. It can't be last minute like your homework,"

"I know . . . I just – you know . . . things are so good right now and Nancy was so scared at first and I feel like if we talk about it, she's gonna get scared again,"

"Does anyone else know?" Jonathan sighs.

"Mike."

"You have to tell your parents. Or at least Nancy has to tell hers,"

Steve bites his lip and shakes his head, annoyed because he assumed that Jonathan would understand this. "My dad beats my ass for no reason. He'd probably actually murder me if I told him about this,"

"Well, then, what about Nancy's? Her mom's cool,"

"I don't know. It's not really my decision,"

"Steve, you guys can't do this alone. I'm not going to let you," It's stupid, perhaps, but Jonathan suddenly feels protective over Nancy. His original misguided and forced romantic feelings for her had turned into a friendship, but at this moment, she was no longer simply a friend. She was a sister, she was family. And yes, Steve was his family too, but in a far different way. Jonathan knew Steve – the best and worst parts of him, and although he didn't want to, he feared that the other boy would run.

"What makes you think we will? And even if we do, we can,"

"How? Babies cost money. Neither of you has got a job,"

"I'll get one. Dude, what's your problem? Not even a 'congrats?' You're being such a downer," Steve scoffs and Jonathan narrows his eyes.

He can't possibly tell Steve of his fears. It would only upset him and push him into doing something stupid. Jonathan mentally kicks himself for even considering Steve's feelings, because right now all he wanted to do was see Nancy and tell her everything was going to be alright. Had Steve said that to her? Probably not. He could be so dumb.

"Sorry. Congrats. It's uh, it's nice. Great! It's great,"

Steve smiles and taps him lightly on the arm. "Thanks, man. Don't mention this to Nancy until I give you a heads up though, okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, just – just tell her soon. I want to talk to her," Steve raises his eyebrow and Jonathan explains. "Just because, you know, I practically raised my brother. I could give her some pointers. And she could use a friend,"

Steve smiles even brighter and it momentarily takes Jonathan's

breath away. "Yeah, she could. Thanks, Jonathan. You're the best, you know that, right?"

*Yeah. The best.*

"Yeah, asshole, I know. And you don't deserve it," he's kidding obviously, and Steve laughs, and everything feels as alright as it can be. Jonathan wonders how Steve can manipulate a situation like that, and he wonders about whether or not it's a good or bad thing. Has Nancy noticed this about him? Does she like it? They're both normally so good at seeing through Steve's façade but maybe love has blinded her.

Meanwhile, beside him, Steve thinks of Nancy's eyes and the birthmark on her inner thigh and how she smells. He pictures her reading their kid a bedtime story, and then they both tuck him or her in and kiss their head and say 'I love you.' And then afterwards, when they're back in their own room, they have sex. Or maybe they don't, maybe they watch a rerun of *Happy Days* and debate over whether or not Steve is right about Scott Baio's career choices. Whatever they're doing, they're happy and everything is perfect. As long as he has Nancy Wheeler by his side, any outcome is the perfect outcome.

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Nancy was more relieved than anything when Steve told her that he'd told Jonathan. They'd never really discussed whether or not they were telling people, so she couldn't blame him for doing it. Plus, it took a big load off her shoulders. Aside from her parents, Jonathan was the person she was most worried about telling. Steve had said that he'd seemed kind of judgmental, but he'd been nothing but caring towards her. It felt good to have someone else knowing. He'd even offered to go to the first ultrasound appointment with her. Nancy assured him that she and Steve had it covered, to which Jonathan responded "Okay. But um, you know, if things aren't good with him or whatever, you know to call me, right?"

It made Nancy think that they were back to this whole love triangle business from the previous year. Did Jonathan not trust Steve anymore? Did her being pregnant somehow reawaken Jonathan's past romantic feelings for her? It wasn't something she really needed to worry about, considering that she wasn't going to just change her

mind about Steve. He was the man she loved, not Jonathan. Well, perhaps that was a little harsh. She loved Jonathan as a friend. And everything was going to work out with Steve. She wanted it to. It had to.

The few weeks leading up to the ultrasound appointment were stressful to say the least. That little girl Max was driving her insane. She was always over at the house, even though Mike obviously didn't like her. They argued often, and although Nancy had scolded her about what she'd said to him at the Ritz, the girl hadn't taken it particularly seriously. The only effect it had had was making her sit between Nancy and Steve at every opportunity and comment on something she didn't like about Nancy's appearance. Things were especially stressful because Will was still in the hospital, and according to Joyce, things had only gotten worse. Nancy, Mike and Steve had tried going over to visit him, but they'd been denied each time.

Mike missed Eleven. He'd cry at night for her sometimes, and Nancy'd sit on the edge of his bed and put his head in her lap until he fell back asleep.

School was rough. They said things were supposed to get easier senior year, but it seemed to be the opposite. When she wasn't worrying about pregnancy drama, she was hauled up in the library studying for her AP classes. Application season was coming up soon as well, and she hadn't decided what she wanted to do yet, if she even wanted to go to college. She and Steve hadn't discussed future plans, and for right now, Nancy was comfortable keeping it that way. This was supposed to be a happy time! She had enough to worry about with Mike and Will and just being pregnant in general. She could concern herself with the future another time.

And so here they were, sitting in a different room at the doctor's office, waiting to get the ultrasound. Waiting to get the first glimpse of the baby. They'd spent the school day passing notes to each other with exclamation points that increased each time a new note was passed. Nancy ate lunch with her friend Kate, who she rarely saw anymore, while Steve and Jonathan hid out under the bleachers and did whatever dumb boy things they did when they were alone. They picked up Mike, ran through the Burger King drive through, and then

dropped him back off at the Wheelers'. The ride to Pawnee had been somewhat heated. They had their first argument since Nancy'd first revealed the pregnancy to him.

"Why can't I get a job? I'm perfectly capable of handling myself!" she'd explained from the passenger's seat.

Steve had just sighed heavily and rolled his eyes. "I know that, okay? But you know . . . you're . . . I just don't think we should put any stress on the baby. That's supposed to be like a bad thing, right?"

"It's not stressful! What, you think I can't handle it? I'm handling school just fine,"

"Yeah, well, you know, school's hard enough as is. I'll get a job, I'll take care of everything,"

Nancy widened her eyes and raised both her eyebrows. "Oh, oh, I see how it is! You want to be the big powerful man who takes care of his weak willed wife who does nothing but pop out babies!"

"What?" Steve looked at her like she was crazy, and shook his head, banging his hand on the wheel. "No! No. I just – we're not even married – what? I'm just trying to think of what's best for the baby,"

"And I'm not?"

"I didn't say that,"

"No, but it was implied! I am a strong, capable woman and frankly, everything you're saying is thinly veiled sexism," Nancy crossed her arms over her chest, and leaned back in her seat.

Steve's confusion furthered. "Nancy, c'mon! You know, I'm not – I'm not like that!"

"Oh, really? Mr. I've-Slept-With-Eighty-Percent-of-Hawkins-High's-Female-Population? You see women as less than you and you know that!" At the time, Nancy hadn't thought she was being unreasonable. She hadn't seen it as pregnancy hormones, she'd seen it as genuine anger. Because Steve was an asshole. And an idiot. And even without pregnancy hormones, she normally thought that.



He shut his eyes, frustrated. "Nancy, I'm not . . . I'm not like that *anymore*. I'm just worried about the baby and you and I want the both of you to be healthy,"

"Well, I can take care of myself,"

An hour later, they were still waiting for the ultrasound technician, sitting in absolute silence. Dr. Saperstein finally enters the room after what felt like forever. "Nancy, Steve, hi. It's good to see you,"

"Hi, Dr. Saperstein. It's good to see you," Steve walks forward and shakes the man's hand. Nancy rolls her eyes, at this clearly man-to-man gesture.

"You two excited?"

"Very," Nancy holds her thin stomach, something that she'd started doing subconsciously. She forces a smile, trying to pretend like she isn't pissed at Steve.

"This is like – the biggest thing to ever happen ever," says Steve.

"Yes, I can imagine," Dr. Saperstein chuckles. He makes his way over to Nancy on the examining table and opens up a drawer, pulling out a bottle of gel. "Now, I need you to lie back and pull up your shirt just a bit. I'm going to rub this gel onto your stomach. Sorry if that sounded creepy,"

"Why?" asks Steve.

"It makes it easier for us to see the baby,"

Nancy does as she told, flipping around on the table – well, it's more like a chair, really. A recliner. She lies back and Steve tentatively stands next to her. "Now, I'm gonna warn you, it's a little cold,"

She shivers as the clear liquid is spread over her stomach. Dr. Saperstein then pulls out a small hand-held device and shows it to them. "This is called a transducer. When I run it over the gel, it'll accept sound waves that'll transmit into images on the screen,"

The screen is tiny, it must be less than ten inches across. Nancy hopes

that the images will be clear enough to make out. Saperstein grins and looks to her, then to the screen. "Well, are you uh, you ready to see your baby?"

Nancy looks at Steve for the first time since the car ride. She's still angry with him, but the connection she feels with him, and the good things it brings, is much stronger than her rage. Steve nods and reaches for her hand. She thinks against it for a moment, but then realizes just how big of a deal this is, and takes it. "Yes. Ready," she answers.

Dr. Saperstein reaches to press some buttons on the transducer and the machine. Nancy can feel her heart rate quickening, and wonders if the baby's is doing the same.

The transducer feels odd on her, almost unnatural, but that must mean it's doing its job. It goes much faster than everything else at this office has – the image appears onscreen within seconds. It's difficult to see, nearly all black with only a few white spots, and it looks to be moving.

"What are we looking at?" asks Steve.

"It looks like nothing, I know, but your baby's there. You see those lines that kind of look like a circle? That's the head and the rest of the white lines – the body," Saperstein points to the screen.

Nancy's toothy smile takes up her entire face as the realization washes over her. "Our baby," she says, a lump forming in her throat. Steve brings her hand to his lips and kisses it. When Nancy looks up at him, he has tears welling in his eyes. Neither of them says anything as the image continues to play and Dr. Saperstein rambles on, but his words go ignored. Nancy thinks she's never felt closer to Steve than she does right now. All of her anger and frustration from earlier disappears, and she finds it ridiculous now. How could she ever feel anything but love for the wonderful boy standing above her? He's given her this beautiful, beautiful baby who's nothing but a few lines on the screen, but still, beautiful. She can see herself holding the child, both of them laughing as Steve comes home from work and kisses them both. At night, they all sleep in the same bed and cuddle, joking around about the day's events. Steve grows older,

their child grows older. It's a boy, she can feel it. He looks like Steve. He graduates from high school and envelops them both in a bear hug. The older version of Nancy is crying – she's so proud of her baby for making it this far, so proud of Steve and herself for raising him to this very moment.

"I love you. You know that, right?" she interrupts Saperstein mid-explanation and squeezes Steve's hand.

Steve wraps his arms around her shoulders and kisses her hair. "I love you, too. I always have."

## 4. december

Jonathan had seemingly forgotten all about his frustration with Steve by the time December came around. He'd spent nearly all of the Wheeler-Byers Thanksgiving dinner asking Nancy a million questions about her plans and about Steve, so when Joyce called to say that Will was coming home later that week, Nancy couldn't have been more thankful. Obviously, she was happy that Will was better, but she was relieved that Jonathan's attentions would be turned back to his brother.

In the past couple of weeks, due to the cold weather, she'd been able to successfully hide her growing baby bump underneath large sweaters. Nancy was surprised she'd been able to keep it a secret for this long. She was even more surprised that Mike had managed to keep his mouth shut up about the whole thing and not accidentally slip up. She'd never thought that he was one to keep secrets well, but then again, he'd kept Eleven in the basement for a week without anyone knowing.

That Sunday morning, Karen drove Mike, Lucas and Dustin over to the Byers' to go and see Will. Nancy had spent the night at her friend Stacy's, wanting a night away from her family and away from Steve. It wasn't like she was angry at Steve or anything, but since he'd started working at the hardware store, she'd become frustrated with him. He wasn't doing anything in particular, and if she wasn't as stubborn as she was, she'd probably attest her frustration to pregnancy hormones. She knew that Steve couldn't help not having time for her anymore and that it was in both of their best interests for him to be working, but still, she couldn't help missing him. And the fact that they weren't having sex anymore was embarrassingly pissing her off. She could almost hear the words "Keep it in your pants, Wheeler," in Barb's voice.

The one time she'd tried since she'd told Steve she was pregnant, he pulled her off of him gently and asked "Should we be doing this?"

It was so out of character for him that Nancy had thought it was a joke. She'd laughed and pulled him back in for a kiss, but he took her by the arms again and said "No."

She stared at him in disbelief.

"Well, I mean . . . it can't be good for the baby, right? I mean, won't like . . . okay, I know this is gonna sound gross, but won't my dick be like . . . you know . . .?"

It took every ounce of Nancy's strength not to punch him in the arm. She hadn't tried anything since then, too needlessly irritated with her boyfriend. Steve knew something was wrong, she could tell, but he hadn't asked her about it yet. Sometimes Nancy thought that Steve didn't know how to bring things up with her, and the thought made her uneasy. Was he not completely comfortable with her? They should be able to talk about anything.

But when Steve drives them over to the Byers' that Sunday morning, there was no awkwardness between them. Perhaps it was their shared excitement over seeing Will, but whatever it was, Nancy felt safe and happy. She hadn't seen Mike since he'd gotten back from the Byers' that morning, so as far as she knew, everything had gone just as her brother had hoped.

Steve opens the door for her and helps her out of the car as Nancy held the slight belly that was growing on her. She keeps her grip on his hand as they walk up to the front door, which Joyce opened almost instantly.

She looked completely exhausted and worn out, and Nancy couldn't blame her. Still, Joyce smiles and wraps her arms around both of them. "Steve, Nancy, thanks for coming over,"

All of a sudden, Nancy felt awkward. She didn't know what she was supposed to say and Joyce was so kind, so good, and she deserved to hear something nice.

Steve takes the woman's hands in his and squeezes them once. "We're really happy that Will's home. He's such a good kid, and I know everyone's missed him,"

Joyce smiles, but it was clearly forced. She looks down at the ground like she was trying to hold back tears and moved away, to let them inside. Jonathan and Will were sitting on the living room couch,

looking at pictures that Nancy assumed Will had drawn. While Jonathan was glancing up at them, Will's eyes were locked onto the papers. He looked so skinny and small, and Nancy wondered if he'd always been that tiny or if it was a new development. Most likely the latter, considering how distressed Jonathan looked.

"Will, sweetie, look who's here to see you," says Joyce, making her way over to sit next to him. She rubs his back gently and her touch makes Will look up, coming face to face with Steve and Nancy.

"Hey, buddy," Steve chuckles, lifting his hand up for a high five. He's always so good at putting on an act, Nancy thinks, because she knows he's nervous. Will ignores him, his eyes now firmly on Nancy's stomach. The back of her neck begins to sweat because he looks so god damn creepy, like the fucking little girl from *Poltergeist*.

Steve puts his hand back down. "We're so glad you're home, dude. Things were like crazy depressing around here without you. I mean, Jonathan bitching in my ear, constantly? And even more than usual? God, it's good to have you back,"

"Baby," It was barely above a whisper, and no one but Nancy seemed to hear it.

"What, sweetie?" asks Joyce.

"Baby," Will says louder.

Jonathan and Joyce both turn to Nancy. Nancy's heart is in her throat.

"Baby," he repeats. "Bad."

"N-no," says Steve, furrowing his brow. "Babies are . . . babies are good,"

Nancy doesn't even care to tell him off for not denying it, because honestly, there's no point. Jonathan knows and Joyce knowing would only be a positive. It's Will right now that's her main concern.

"Bad," says Will. Nancy's skin is tingling and she takes a step back as Will stands up from the couch.

Just as he stands, he begins to scream. He holds both sides of his head and falls back down, his whole body shaking. Steve steps in front of Nancy and puts his arm out in front of her. Joyce and Jonathan are grabbing onto his arms, asking him what's wrong, asking what they can do.

"BAD! BAD! BAD!" Will screams over and over again. Nancy wants to lunge forward and help, but she knows that she can't. It's her. She's the problem.

"Get out!" Joyce yells at her. It's not malicious, and Nancy knows that she isn't angry with her, but it still hurts. All she wants is to be able to talk to Joyce right now about the baby and ask her a million questions, but the world they live in isn't normal enough for that.

Steve grabs her by the hand and pulls her out of the house as fast as he can. Nancy can still hear Will's shrieks and she starts to pray that he stops, and that all of his pain goes away. Will is such a good boy – why did he deserve this? Why the fuck would God put all this on the shoulders of a person who deserved nothing but good things?

Once they're both inside the car, Steve drives away faster than Nancy would've thought. She's so shaken and taken aback, she doesn't know what to say or do. *Baby. Bad.*

"What the fuck was that?" Steve asks loudly. "How the shit did he know you were pregnant? You're not showing, I mean, what the fuck?"

"Obviously it's some supernatural reason," Nancy states, trying not to roll her eyes. What other reason could there be?

"The Upside Down lets him detect people's pregnancies? Does he have powers now? Like Eleven?!"

"I don't know, Steve,"

"And 'bad?' What the fuck? Do you think the baby's in danger? You know what, the baby's in danger. We're going to see Saperstein right fucking now," Steve pushes harder on the gas.

"No, Steve, c'mon –"

"He has powers! The baby's in danger! You're in danger! Fuck, fuck, fuck."

Steve always knows what to say when they're not in a crisis. When a crisis happens, that's when the coward in him comes out. Nancy had learned that a while ago. It's frustrating, but she knows better than to get mad at him for it. It's just the way that he is and while she might not like it, you can't change somebody. Still, he's starting to freak her out even more than she already was. She needs for him to tell her that everything is okay right now.

"Okay, I know you're freaked out, but can we just pull over? Think for a minute?" she tries to hide how exasperated she is.

"No, no, Nance, we have to get to Pawnee now. Wait, should we go to the hospital first?"

"Steve –"

"Fuck, how do you get to the hospital again?" he bangs his hand on the wheel multiple times, a crazed look in his eyes.

"Steve!" Nancy turned to him entirely, grabbing his arm with both of her hands. Steve stops moving and looks over at her, his eyes wide and his lips trembling. It was maybe the most vulnerable she'd ever seen him, and if they weren't driving, she would've kissed him right there. Within a few seconds, Steve's expression softens.

"Okay," he mutters. They pull over to the side of the road and when Steve puts the car in park, Nancy unbuckles and wraps her arms around his neck. He leans his head against hers, like he's too drained to do anything else.

"I don't know what that was back there," says Nancy. "But we can't freak out,"

"It was some – some fucking Upside Down, shit, that's what it was. Didn't you see Will? He looked possessed,"

Nancy lifts her head from his shoulder but keeps her arms in place. "We don't know that,"



"Well, then how did he know you were pregnant?"

"I don't know . . . maybe Jonathan told him?"

Steve looks at her like she's crazy. "He wouldn't do that,"

Nancy was trying to remain neutral and logical. She wanted to believe that everything that had gone down was over with, even though she knew in her heart that it wasn't. "We don't know that,"

"I do. He wouldn't do that to us," he pauses for a brief moment. "And Mike wouldn't tell him either. Maybe he's got powers like Eleven, you know? Like X-Ray vision,"

"I don't think Eleven had X-Ray vision,"

"How are you being so calm?" Steve barks out an obviously fake laugh. "We could be like – you and the baby could be in danger,"

"Because we don't know what's going on just yet. We shouldn't make assumptions,"

"I just – I just don't anything bad to happen to you," It sounds like he's holding back tears, and Nancy can't help but run her hand through his hair. It's just so Steve to feel legitimate pain for her well being, and while she's stressed out for numerous different reasons, her love for him outweighs all of that.

"Nothing bad is gonna happen," Nancy whispers.

"You don't know that,"

"Look at me," she puts her finger on his chin and pulls his face towards her. "I'm strong, okay? Do you not think I can handle whatever happens?"

"No, Nancy, I – I know you can. I just . . . I don't think that I can,"

"What do you mean?"

Steve exhales deeply and pulls her legs onto his lap. Nancy gets the message and scoots her butt on top of him. She's self-conscious that in

a couple of months, they probably won't be able to sit like this. Steve rubs her waist and puts his head on her chest so that she's resting her chin on his forehead. "If anything happened to the baby, I don't think I could deal. I can barely deal with anything, I mean like, if something bad happens, I just lose it. And that's over shit that doesn't even really matter in the scheme of things. And you? I mean, it's like you said, you're so strong. And brave and resilient. No matter what happens, I know that you'll be okay. All I've got to live for is you, and now this kid, and I just . . . I don't know. It's dumb. I'm sorry,"

Nancy has never been able to understand Steve. Sometimes, she thought that she did, but then there were times like this. He had so much going for him, he was so effortlessly charming, he was athletic and hardworking. And yet, he didn't see any of it. Hearing him say 'All I've got to live for is you' made Nancy uneasy in a weird way. She didn't want to be someone's reason for living. It sounded selfish, maybe, but she didn't want that pressure. Nancy didn't trust herself not to disappoint people. She didn't think that she was too good for Steve or that Steve was too good for her – it was always an equal balance of power in her eyes, but it clearly wasn't for Steve.

"If I tell you that everything's going to be okay will that calm you down?" it's all she can think to say.

She knows that he's regretting even saying anything at all. He bites the inside of his mouth and nods, "Yeah, it would,"

"Everything's going to be okay," she says, even though they both know that it's a lie.

Mike, Lucas and Dustin clearly hadn't gotten the reaction they'd wanted from Will either. They were all still just as depressed as usual, although Lucas and Dustin hid it better than Mike did. The only thing that seemed to cheer Mike up nowadays was the idea of having a nephew or niece. Nancy had told him time and time again that she wasn't sure if they were keeping it yet, but he ignored her. He was reading all of Karen's old parenting books in his spare time and going on about how he was going to be the best Uncle ever.

He'd gotten his heart broken too many times for someone so young and kind. It broke Nancy's heart to even think about how upset he

would be if she chose to give the baby up.

As if the draining feeling of being a disappointment to everyone wasn't enough, Jonathan was ignoring her. She suspected that he was embarrassed about how things with Will had gone down, although part of her feared that maybe he thought Will was right. Maybe he too thought that there was something wrong with her beautiful, beautiful baby.

One person who wasn't avoiding her was Max. Ever since they'd gone to the diner, Max seemed to always be hanging around the Wheeler house and it was always when she and Steve were trying to be alone. She'd bang on Nancy's door and ask a million rude, personal questions. Mike didn't like her all that much either and only tolerated her presence for Dustin and Lucas's sake, and Nancy could understand why. She didn't want to say that she disliked a little girl, but she sure was annoying as all fuck.

The day the schools let out for holiday break, Mike and Max came racing through the front door. Mike was giggling loudly, holding a notebook above his head where Max couldn't reach and Max was chasing after him, threatening him with bodily harm. Nancy had been trying to take a nap on the couch, but Max's screaming alerted her and she jumped right up. Mike slammed right into her and she lost her balance for a moment.

"Nance, are you okay?!" asks Mike, grabbing onto her hand to keep her steady. Max seizes the opportunity to grab the notebook from him, but Mike is still way taller than she is.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Mike, just give her back whatever that is,"

"No way! I finally got dirt on her!"

"Fuck you, Wheeler!" Max proclaims, shaking her head. Nancy's honestly surprised she hasn't kicked him in the shins or something yet.

"If I were you, I'd be a little nicer to me. Unless you want me to tell Nancy all about your little journal,"

"You have her journal?!" Nancy shakes her head. She has to help Max! Reading a girl's journal is the ultimate betrayal and violation of privacy. Nancy snatches the thing back from Mike but before she can hand it to Max, she sees that it's been flipped open to one specific entry. In bold red marker, the words *Mrs. Steve Harrington* have been written. Seeing Steve's name catches Nancy off guard and she looks at the thing. Max groans and turns away in shame, knowing that there's no point in grabbing it back from her now.

She's drawn a big heart in the center of the page and inside, in cursive, reads *Max + Steve*. Next to each of their names are two crudely drawn figures – Max, her red hair down to her waist, wearing a pretty pink dress, and Steve, wearing a tuxedo. Surrounding the heart are different versions of herself and Steve's names, a lot of them surrounded by smaller hearts. Nancy's heart swells because this has to be the absolute cutest thing she's ever seen.

"Aren't you jealous, Nancy? She's gonna steal your boyfriend!" Mike laughs crudely and Nancy hits his arm. Max furiously grabs her notebook from Nancy and storms down to the basement, flipping Mike off.

"You suck, dick breath!" she yells behind her.

"What is your problem?" Nancy demands the second she's gone.

Mike is still smiling. "Oh, c'mon, Nance. She's been horrible to me all year! Let me have this!"

"No! You can't just – why would you even read her journal? It's private!"

He ignores her question. "Who cares? She sucks. It's what she deserves,"

"Mike, no. You never humiliate a girl, especially when it involves someone they have a crush on!"

Mike is still taking some pleasure from this, which irritates Nancy. "You don't think it's like a little funny that she wants to steal your boyfriend?"

"No. Now fuck off, I'm trying to rest. And lay off Max while you're at it,"

She knows that he's going to listen to her even though he doesn't want to. Mike shrugs her off and joins Max in the basement and Nancy can't help but wonder what the girl is even doing here. She clearly hates Mike and yeah, she could be here to see Steve, but she'd seen he wasn't here. And Mike was such a dick to her! Why would she want to be anywhere near him?

It kept Nancy thinking for the couple of hours that Max was over. So much so that when Max announced she was going to walk home, Nancy offered her a ride. The small girl gave her a dirty look, but stood there with her arms crossed as Nancy grabbed the keys. She couldn't figure out why Max would want to go anywhere with her after being humiliated like she was, but then again, it was December. Maybe she just didn't want to walk home in the freezing cold.

Max doesn't say a single word after giving Nancy her address. She sits with her head against the car window, her hand on her cheek, her usual pissed off expression apparent. After a minute or so, Nancy spoke. "So . . . Christmas. It's a pretty great time of year, right?"

"Cut to the chase, big Wheeler," she scoffs. "We both know why you wanted to drive me so just ahead and say whatever it is you wanted to say,"

Nancy did her best not to roll her eyes. "Mike can be a jerk sometimes. I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for what he did, even if he's not,"

"I don't want your pity," Her stubbornness reminds Nancy oddly of Mike and she wonders why they don't get along.

"I'm not pitying you. I just . . . I'm not gonna say anything, in case you thought I was going to,"

Max looks at her for the first time. Nancy can't decide what the redhead is feeling. "Why not?"

She raises an eyebrow. "Why would I do something like that?"

"Why *not*?" Max repeats.

"Girls don't do that to other girls," Nancy explains. "We have to stick together,"

Max's expression softens, but only somewhat. She still seems wary of Nancy's intentions. "I thought you'd be mad," Max states in a soft tone that sounds nothing like her regular voice.

A small smile breaks out on Nancy's face. "Well, I guess I'm gonna have some tough competition but I'm glad it's someone that I respect,"

It's almost shocking that Max actually chuckles a little bit at that. She doesn't say anything else, but Nancy sees her grinning out of the corner of her eye. Maybe this was all Max needed to soften up – some genuine kindness that came without being condescending. She made a note to advise Mike of that for later occasions, but he probably wouldn't care much.

Max's calm disappeared once Nancy pulled up at the appropriate address. It was a smaller house than her own, and sitting outside on the front porch smoking a cigarette, was a boy she knew from school. Billy, she thought his name was. She knew he kind of had a bad boy reputation, and not in the way that Steve did. His rep was dangerous. Nancy heard rumors from her girlfriends that he'd actually killed a guy in his old town. Upon seeing how nervous Max was to go inside, it suddenly seemed believable.

"Is that your brother?" she asks.

"*Step* brother," Max insists. She stares down at her hands in her lap and Nancy tentatively turns to her, her hand still on the steering wheel.

"Are you okay?"

She doesn't look up.

Nancy now knows why Max hangs out at her house despite disliking Mike. She's scared of her step-brother, she's scared of being at home. That must've been why she was so mean all the time – as a defense

mechanism. As if in an instant, all of her irritation at the young girl disappeared.

"You know," Nancy begins, somewhat awkwardly. "If you want to stay over at my house tonight, I'm sure that would be okay,"

Max doesn't move her head but her eyes are on Nancy now. She considers for a moment and then says, "No. I'll um . . . thanks for the ride,"

She steps out of the car and walks up her driveway cautiously. Billy stands up from the steps to greet her, blowing cigarette smoke in her face. Nancy almost unbuckles to say something until she feels a harsh pain in her stomach. It's like what she imagines getting stabbed to be like, except it subsides within a few seconds. She stays still, trying to see if it happens again. When it does, she fears that it could be cramps and something *bad* could be going on. She doesn't feel anything between her legs, no blood, so maybe everything was okay? *Everything's okay, everything's okay, everything's okay*, she repeated it to herself over and over again and still, it didn't calm her down. It only made things worse because she hadn't meant it when she'd said it to Steve, so she probably didn't mean it now either.

Billy's eyes were still on her and his stare made her extremely uncomfortable. It was like he was undressing her with his eyes and there was nothing about it that made her feel sexy or special. It made her feel dirty. Once he followed Max into the house after giving her a wink, Nancy let herself hold onto her stomach and cry out in pain. The cramps were subsiding, but the aftershocks were still prominent and making her small frame shake. She wished that her mother was there and that she could tell her about everything. All Nancy wanted in that moment was to be a little girl again and for her mom to hold in her arms and comfort her.

She was going to have to tell her eventually. Pregnancy wasn't exactly something that you could hide for too long. But Nancy knew her mom, and she knew that she was going to ask a million questions that would come off as judgmental, even if she didn't mean for them to be. The shitty thing was that she couldn't really tell *anybody*. She'd only told Mike because it was a weak moment for her and she hadn't even told Steve yet, and he was the closest thing she had to someone

she could trust. And yeah, Jonathan knew, but he had been weird about the whole thing and was acting like he had some authority over what happened to the baby. Will knowing was a nightmare because he hadn't been in control of himself for months now and could let it slip to literally everyone. And as much as it hurt Nancy to say, she didn't even think that she could've told Barb if she was here. She'd hated Steve and Nancy could practically hear her calling the child "devil spawn."

Everything sucked so fucking bad and for that moment in time, it didn't feel like anything would ever get better.

After a few minutes of crying, Nancy managed to pull herself together enough to drive home. She wasn't in pain anymore, at least physically, and sitting outside of Max's house for any longer would be borderline creepy. It was somewhat lame of her to even be concerned with how she looked right now, but she couldn't help it. Caring about what others think of you is something that never goes away, and it was a large part of the reason why the baby was a secret in the first place.

That wouldn't be the case for much longer.

Three days before Christmas, Nancy had another appointment with Dr. Saperstein. Everything had weighing on her heavily lately, and she needed to hear her doctor tell her everything looked normal. She knew that it was a long shot for him to be able to tell if anything supernatural was happening, but having the baby checked out would be at least a little comforting.

She hadn't told Steve about the cramps the other day. It was lame of her to care about his feelings about her body, but she did. She loved him, how could she not? And why would she want to upset him?

Still, there was another talk they needed to have.

"Steve?" she asks as he bops his head along to Michael Jackson.

He stops singing along only to mutter "Yeah?" and then go back to what he was doing.



"What are we going to do with the baby?" she questions loudly.

Steve turns to her and then shuts the radio off. "What do you want to do?"

"I'm asking you," she states. "I mean, I know what I want, but I want to know what you want before I tell you what I want,"

"So, this is like a quiz?" he raises an eyebrow. Nancy does her best not to groan. "Uh . . . I mean . . . it doesn't really matter what I want. You just tell me what you want, and we'll do it,"

She's suddenly reminded of why it is that she loves him so much. If they weren't driving, she would've kissed them right there. "I think . . . I think I want to keep it," says Nancy, feeling a bit afraid. "Like, I know that's dumb because I want to go to college and this isn't the life I wanted for myself or for you and I'm sorry that I feel the way I do but –"

"I want to keep it too," Steve was smiling so brightly, he resembled an angel. The sun was shining through the window and reflecting off of his head to form a halo.

"Are you just saying that?"

"No, I was hoping that you were gonna want to keep it," What he didn't say was what he was really thinking. He'd never planned for a future outside of Nancy (he definitely wasn't going to college) and to him, raising a family with her was the perfect endgame.

"I'm so glad you think so," Nancy lights up. "Because I don't think I could give my baby away. And I still want to go to school, but maybe we could work something out, you know? Like I can take a year off and then when I do go, Mike and Jonathan can babysit for us. We can make it work, right?"

Steve nods and takes her hand from her lap, bringing it to his lips. "Of course, babe. We always do, right?"

Fuck, she loves him so much. There is no one better than Steve Harrington in the whole world and Nancy Wheeler is positive of it. He is the saving grace of the male gender, hell, he's the saving grace

of the human race. It's fucked up, but she hopes that wherever Barb is she feels like shit for being so wrong about this perfect man.

They're still holding hands and giggling when they're sat inside of Saperstein's office. Nothing in the world could break what either of them are feeling in this moment, not even Will's threat looming on both of their shoulders.

That is, until Saperstein enters the room, his brows furrowed. He isn't wearing his usual carefree expression. Nancy doesn't notice this at first, but Steve does. "Whoa, what's up, Doc?" he asks.

"Long day, is all,"

It should've been a sign of what was to come. "Let's get to it, shall we?" he asks and Nancy nods. Steve lifts her onto the examination table and this time, she kisses his hand. Saperstein goes through the routine, rubbing the cold gel onto her stomach and booting up the tiny machine. "Looks like you've gained an inch or so, Nancy," he says in regards to her weight.

"Yep! That means the baby's nice and healthy, right?"

"It's always a good sign," he confirms.

"Little girl's gonna be just as chubby as you were as a baby, Nance," Steve chuckles, ruffling her hair.

"You think it's a girl?" asks Saperstein.

"He wants it to be," Nancy explains. "He doesn't want a boy,"

"It's not that I don't one. It's just that he's gonna be just like me, and I'm a pain in the ass," Nancy and Saperstein don't dispute his point.

Saperstein places the transducer on Nancy's stomach and she feels the same excitement that she did a month ago. Steve's attention is pointed to the screen, squinting his eyes to try and see any new details.

The doctor is being awfully quiet and more attentive than he normally is. He also won't take his eyes off the screen as he rubs the

transducer around Nancy's stomach. "It's so beautiful," Nancy whispers to Steve.

Saperstein places the transducer on the table and rubs at his forehead. "Uh, yeah . . . I think I missed something last time,"

"What do you mean? Is the baby okay?"

"Yeah, no. Everything looks great. It's just that . . . it, uh, it looks like you're having twins,"

The whole world stops.

Steve looks at Nancy for her reaction, but she doesn't have one. "I'm sorry, can you repeat that?" she asks.

"You're having twins,"

"How did you – how did you miss this?" Steve sounds concerned. He's trying to mask it, but Nancy knows him well enough to know how he is.

Saperstein puts the transducer back on Nancy and points out two blobs, distinct now that they're being pointed out. "You just miss things sometimes, it's normal,"

Nancy's heart is beating fast in her chest. One baby is one thing, but two? God, she didn't even like dealing with Mike and Holly together sometimes and they were years apart. Twins was a whole other story. Steve seemed to be less panicked than her though, focusing on just asking all of his questions.

"Can you – can you tell what they are? Like boys and girls or -?"

Saperstein squinted again and ran the transducer sideways. "It looks like you're having a boy *and* a girl," he states and then motions up to the monitor. "See? There's the penis on this one, but not on the other,"

Nancy's grip on Steve's hand tightens. He can feel how nervous she is and forces a smile. "Well, a little Steve and a little Nancy. At least the Nancy can get Steve Jr. to chill out if he gets too annoying,"

She smiles slightly, but still says nothing. Saperstein takes note of her discomfort. "You know, Nancy, adoption is still an option. And abortions at this stage aren't unheard of."

"No, no," she shakes her head. "No, I'll uh . . . I'm gonna carry them to term,"

He shrugs.

"They're already so beautiful," Steve states.

"Did you two want to keep looking or should we move on to the check up?"

Steve looks to Nancy once more. She glances up at him, oddly unsure of the whole thing. She suddenly has no idea what to do about anything and she needs Steve to make this decision for her.

"Uh, we can move on. Thank you," Steve says.

Nancy is quiet for the days following the appointment. Steve barely hears from her until Christmas night, when he shows up at the Wheelers'. Karen kisses his cheeks and Holly jumps into his arms. Being with the Wheelers is the only time Steve has really felt like he's a part of a family. That same morning, his own mother had just given him a hug and left him with his presents. His father was nowhere to be found. Steve couldn't wait for the twins to be born, for when he would really be an official Wheeler.

Of course, Karen and Ted still didn't know and he felt guilty about that. They'd been so good to him and here he was, lying. But Nancy's feelings were more important to him and keeping her happy was all that mattered. She'd tell them in her own time.

Having twins excited him. And a boy and a girl, too? Jesus, they were going to be the perfect suburban family. Steve would work so fucking hard and they'd never have to worry about anything. Nancy would be the successful scientist that she wanted to be and at the end of the day, they'd come home and have dinner together. The twins would help each other out the way siblings were supposed to. Nancy was already so god damn perfect, and with this fucking perfect family,

he'd start to seem like he was too.

"How's Will, man?" he asks Mike after supper, intent on brotherly bonding whether Mike wanted it or not.

"Fucked up," Mike says bluntly.

Steve rubs his shoulder. "I want to say some 'everything's gonna be okay' bullshit, but I don't know if it will be,"

"Me neither,"

"Nancy and I got your back, though. Remember that,"

Mike nods. "Yeah, I know. I got you guys too,"

It warms his heart more than it probably should, but he knows now that Mike actually does care for him. Or at least he's starting to. Or maybe it's just that he loves Nancy and is just choosing to put up with Steve. Whatever it is, Steve pulls Mike in for a side hug and the kid actually lets him.

"I'm gonna go check on Nance," Steve says when he pulls away and stands.

"Yeah, you better. She's been in a pissy mood,"

That's expected.

And she sure looks like she's in one when Steve finds her sitting in the basement, away from all the commotion upstairs. Her legs are crossed and she's sitting on the couch, playing with a Rubik's cube absentmindedly. "Hey," he says.

She looks at him for a moment, but then looks back down at her hands. "Hey,"

"You mind if I sit with you?"

She shakes her head. He sits down beside her and brings her head to his lips. "You know you can change your mind," he says, just above a whisper. "We can give 'em up, if that's what you want. I wouldn't . . .

I wouldn't hold it against you,"

Nancy is silent for a moment, but then she looks at him. "So you wouldn't leave?"

"If you decided you didn't want them?"

"Yeah,"

"No. Nothing could ever make me leave you. Real question is – you gonna leave me?"

Nancy raises her eyebrows like the question is a shock to her. "Everybody always leaves," he explains. He doesn't have to say who he's talking about because they both know. His parents have never been there, Tommy, Carol, every single one of his friends when he decided to better himself, every girlfriend he'd ever had when he fucked up. His response makes Nancy wrap her arms around his neck and kiss his cheek.

"I won't," she responds.

"I'd never force you to do anything, but I – I think we'd have a really great family. You're a great sister, so you know, you'd be a great mother. And I – I can try. I'll be better than my dad. I know you think that . . . I know you think I'll turn out like him, and I know you won't say it out loud but we both know it's true," Steve pauses and brushes some stray hair out of her eyes. "I'm not my father. I won't be him. I'll always take care of you, I promise,"

Nancy opens her mouth to speak and then closes it again. Steve is well aware of every flaw that he has, and if Nancy wants to blame not wanting twins on him, it's okay. She's allowed to do that. But what she says surprises him. "When . . . when I first met you, I knew you'd be trouble. But I liked that. I craved that if I'm being honest with myself. And I'm not going to act like you proved me completely wrong, because you're still that impulsive shit you were back then. But . . . you're not *just* an impulsive shit. You're funny, and sweet, and kind. You care about everything too much. And I think you've got the biggest heart of anyone I've ever met. And that impulsivity, it could also just be bravery in most situations, because God, you're really

fucking brave. And I do trust you, Steve, I do. You've proven yourself to me so many times. I know that you're not your dad. I know that now. So you're not the problem here. I am,"

It's Steve who's surprised this time. Nancy's words had made him feel like he was walking on clouds, like he was the best guy in the world. It was almost funny the kind of power she had over his emotions. "You're – you're perfect, what the fuck are you talking about?"

"No, I'm not," she insists. "You just think that I am because you love me. I never have any fucking idea what I'm doing. And I'm not a good sister. I'm a pretty shitty one actually. And I know it's dumb but all I keep thinking about is how disappointed Barb would be about how my life turned out,"

Steve always felt uncomfortable when Barb got brought up, mostly because he still felt like the whole thing was all his fault. She also had clearly despised him, and Steve knew that Nancy's "Barb would be disappointed" was about their relationship. And he couldn't do anything to fix that, because it wasn't like Steve planned on their relationship ending. Still, he had to at least try to be supportive.

"Maybe you should give her a little more credit?" he suggests. "I mean, she was your best friend. Maybe she'd be happy for you,"

"No," Nancy whispers. "But then again, you know, she wasn't always right about everything. She was wrong about you,"

*Yeah, right,* Steve thinks to himself.

"Alright then – then fuck whatever she'd think. You don't always have to agree with the people you love. I mean, Christ, Jonathan and I disagree on everything. Just – you know, stay true to yourself and all that corny shit,"

Nancy kisses his cheek. "Tell me what you think we should do. Like . . . twins is a lot of responsibility. Way more than just one kid,"

Steve inhales deeply. "It's like I said, you're my whole world. Having a kid with you is like a dream come true – two is like, you know, two times that. But yeah, I know that it'll be hard. So if you don't want to

. . . we can . . . whatever. I just want to make you happy. But if you let me, I promise I'll take care of you guys. I'll work my fucking ass off 24/7 so that you can go to school and you can be the kickass scientist you want to be. Or I'll stay home with the babies and you can work. Whatever you want. I'll do anything and everything to give you everything that you deserve. And more. You just have to let me,"

She hadn't been lying when she said that she trusted Steve more than anyone. She just didn't know if *anyone* could handle a responsibility this big. Because seriously, who the fuck even has twins? Nobody! If there was a God, he was really playing a joke on them.

Nancy places her hand on top of Steve's. "I want to keep them, of course I do. They're mine. I just . . . I'm scared,"

"I am too. But we're in this together, right? We'll figure it out together. We will, I promise,"

"Even if whatever Will said does turn out to be true?"

Steve takes a deep breath. "Yeah, especially then,"

Nancy turns to look him in the eye and that dumb voice in the back of her head wanted to jump his bones, as lame as that was. The rational, non hormonal part of her thought about what he was offering her: a life. A lifetime together (although a proposal was unspoken, it was clearly there). Their own family. Breaking away from the Wheeler clan and forming their own Wheeler-Harrington clan. And the strange thing was that Nancy didn't actually mind it. Spending forever with Steve sounded . . . nice. She could still get the future that she'd wanted, couldn't she? She could still be a scientist. She could still have the successful future she wanted. And no, Jonathan, she didn't have to be just like her mom. Karen Wheeler had never had anything like this offered to her. After all, Ted was no Steve. The thought made Nancy bite back a smile.

"I love you," she says. "I . . . I want to do this. Together,"

Steve eyes welled up with tears nearly instantly and he pulls apart from Nancy, placing his hands on her arms. "Really?"



"Really," she nods.

He kisses her square on the mouth and then brings her in for a hug. "I love you so much. So, so much."